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EXPLORING THE CITY OF SECRETS

Did Saunière find the Holy Grail in Spain?

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THE BEAST OF DARTMOOR

Mystery creature photographed!

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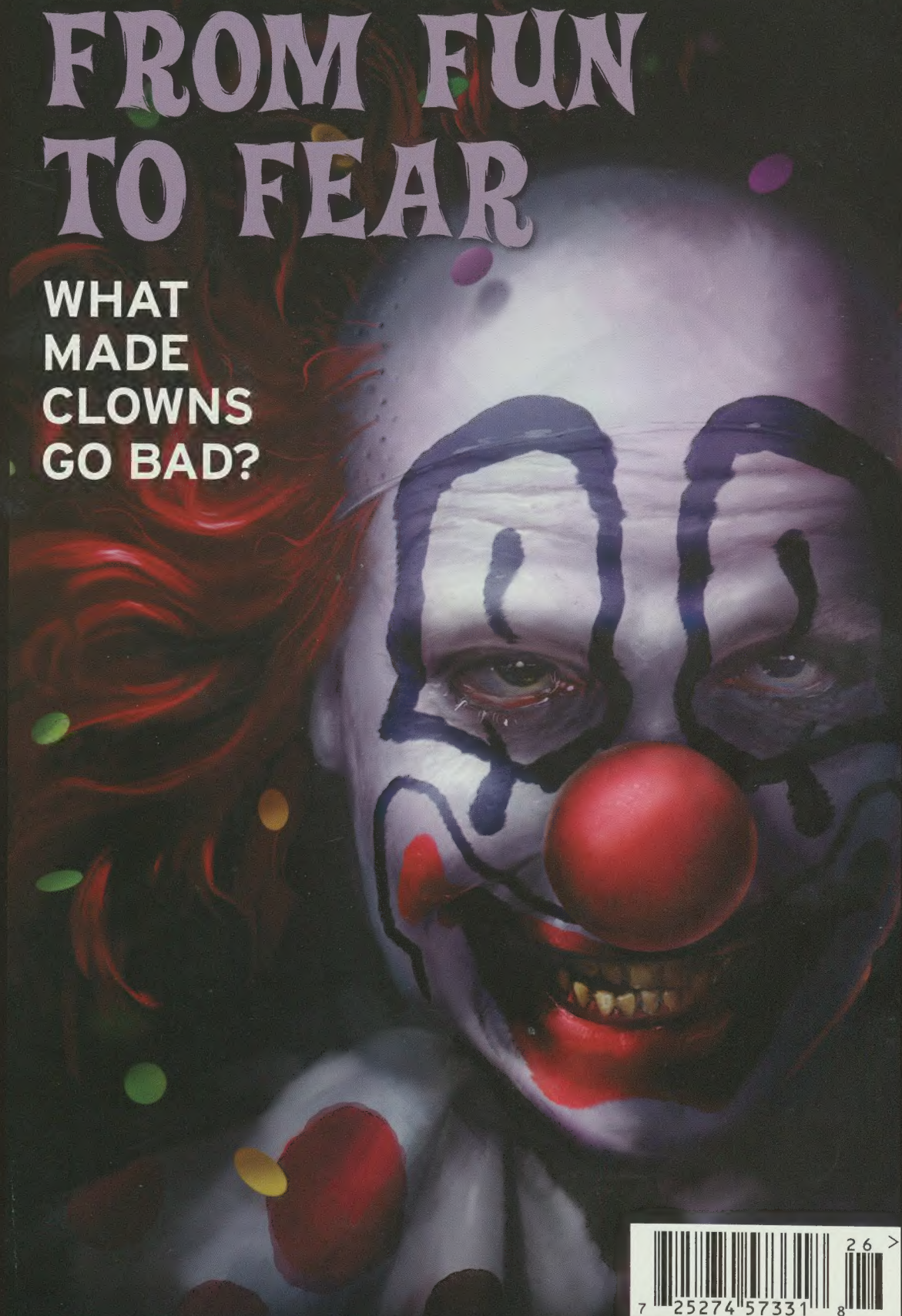
BRITAIN'S MEN IN BLACK

Lifting the lid on the UFO-hunters of DI 55

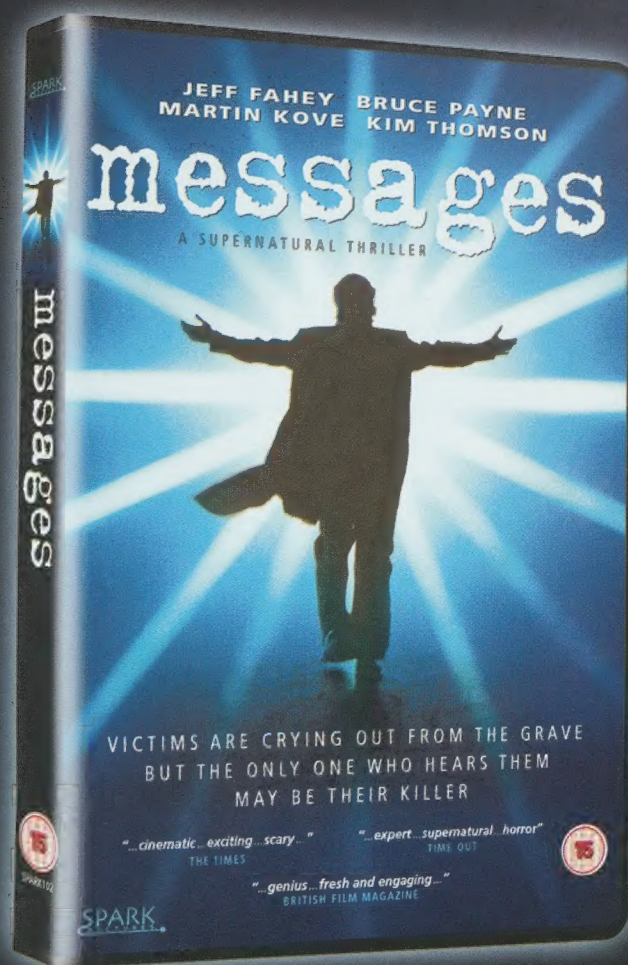
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FROM FUN TO FEAR

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CLOWNS
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editorial

No cover-up, just cock-ups

It seems to have been cock-up season here at *FT* lately, so we give over this issue's editorial to correcting our numerous errors...

FT223:56-57: We'd like to apologise for some missing Korean character substitutions in Marinus van der Sluijs's 'Korean Signs and Wonders' Forum; these were lost during the preparation of the page and led to a number of proper names appearing incorrectly.

These should have appeared as follows: King Muryōl, Soch'on (paragraph three); Sōngbu-san (para. six); Kūmmo-saji (para. seven); and Puyō (para. eight).

FT225: In our rush to get this rather complicated issue to press, several errors and omissions found their way into our special '60 years of UFOs' section. Firstly, we'd like to apologise to veteran abduction researcher and artist Budd Hopkins (and to any of his friends or family who suffered unnecessary alarm) for suggesting that he was deceased. Our reference to "the late Budd Hopkins" (p36) was a case of crossed wires leading to a confusion with the (genuinely) late John Mack, who of course died in a tragic road accident in London in 2004. Budd, we were told, was as surprised as anyone to read of his own demise and would like to assure *FT* readers that he is most certainly still in the land of the living!

Our 'Ufology at 60' section also suffered from a few last-minute layout problems that slipped past us. Robert Rosamond and John Spencer's entry (p25) had text partially hidden by a picture, which read: "Ufology has largely come of age, and has identified many of its previous failings. It has gradually recognised the need to acquire and apply knowledge of subjects once considered beyond ufological jurisdiction, and in so doing has become better able to recognise and address the many complex mechanisms frequently hidden behind the face value of a consistent phenomenon. It is also, as a result, slowly coming to terms with the fact that we may have to range further than previously realised in the pursuit of possible answers."

"So the future depends on our ability to adapt a much wider range of tools to the task of understanding the phenomenon."

Jenny Randles's contribution (p29) was truncated and should have concluded: "Ufology needs to mature and accept that there is no conspiracy to hide some shocking truth of alien invasion. There is no cover-up, just a cock-up caused by typical bureaucratic ineptitude obscuring only the fact that the powers that be were just as

much out of their depth as either the media or the UFO community." Anyone who thought that *FT* was attempting a cover-up can rest assured that the kind of cock-up Jenny refers to is much more in our line. And one of Jenny's timeline entries, for 1996 (p50), lost its final word: "The Civil Aviation Authority admits that it has investigated a UFO sighting by a BA flight crew near Manchester and that it remains unexplained."

And finally, in response to the reader who complained that "pages 23 to 56 do not exist" we'd like to point out that these pages *do* in fact exist but are, perhaps irritatingly, unnumbered (rendering the page references thoughtfully provided above of dubious value, to say the least). Sorry.

Seven Fortean Wonders

Inspired by the recent 07/07/07 New Seven Wonders of the World project – inviting people from around the world to vote for their favoured seven man-made wonders – the Charles Fort Institute is trying to find the 'Seven Fortean Wonders of the World'. In the words of

the CFI's Gordon Rutter: "Nominations will be kept secret, and the most popular ones will go forward for voting. We're accepting places and artefacts but not people; although I suppose artefacts of people will be allowable, so while you can't vote for Charles Fort, the body of a saint alleged to cure you if you lick it would be eligible. Should be fun!"

After an initial round of proposals, a defence of the resulting candidates will take place on the CFI forum, followed by voting. The eventual winners will be announced in *FT* and on the CFI website. To take part, log on to www.fortean.org.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?



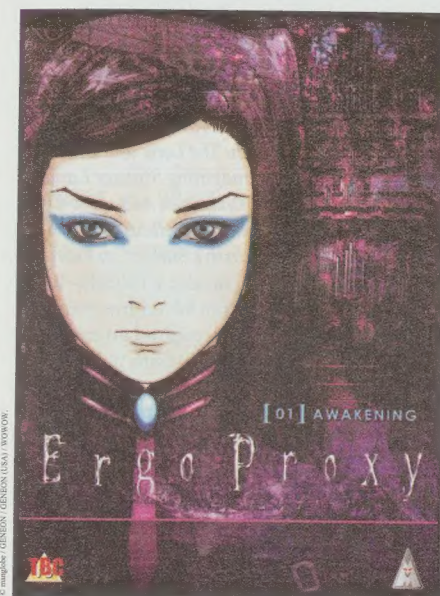
Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

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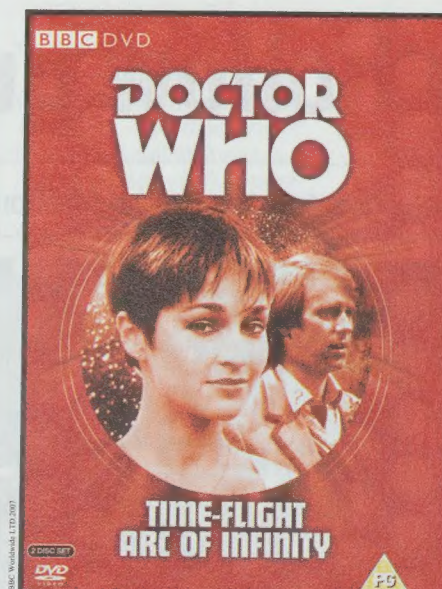
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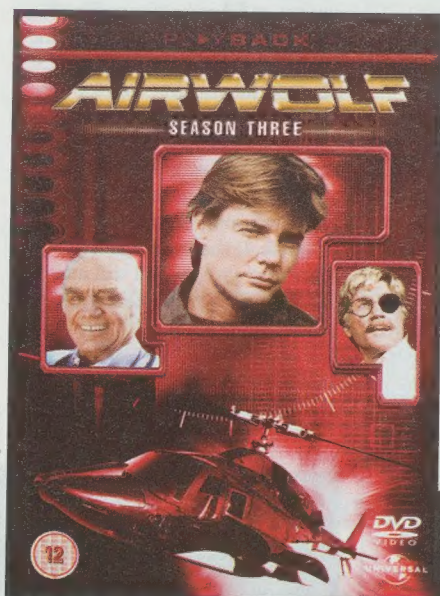
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strangedays

Not so hollow pursuits?

Two famous, if unlikely, quests return to the forefront of fortan investigations



LEFT: The Basilica of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura. BELOW: A recent book on the Hollow Earth legend.

the same spot. The catacombs where Barbaggio believes the Grail is buried come under the authority of the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. A spokesman said: "We are aware of the reports and a few weeks ago made an initial investigation of the area with the possibility of opening the catacombs up, but as yet no decision has been made."

The Holy Grail appears first in *Perceval, le Conte du Graal*, an unfinished poem by Chrétien

Kircher in the 17th century (see *Arktos: the Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* by Joscelyn Goodwin, 1993; and *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvellous Machines Below the Earth's Surface* by David Standish, 2006; also FT153:42-48.)

In 2005, Utah adventure guide Steve Currey organised an expedition to locate the north polar opening. It's not clear whether he was a true Hollow Earth believer or if he simply saw a good business opportunity. Anyway, he somehow pinpointed the Arctic portal at 84.4° N and 41° E, roughly 250 miles (400km) northwest of Ellesmere Island. The North Pole Inner Earth expedition was due last summer, with spaces offered to anyone with US\$20,000 to spare. Currey died suddenly of brain cancer, and Agnew stepped in to take his place. While he insists the journey has a genuine scientific purpose, he also says the expedition will include several experts in meditation, mythology and UFOs, as well as a team of filmmakers.

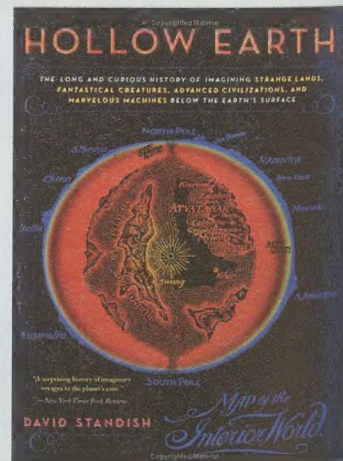
Agnew promises a grand polar adventure, no matter what the outcome. If the polar opening isn't there, the voyage "will still make an outstanding documentary," he promises. "But if we do find something, this will be the greatest geological discovery in the history of the world." (*Toronto National Post*, 30 May 2007.

de Troyes, dated between 1180 and 1191; there is no direct evidence it ever actually existed. Yet, centuries later, enthusiasts still seek it here, there and everywhere – and several have claimed to have found it. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has it buried under Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland. *D.Telegraph*, 21 Jun 2007.

HOLLOW EARTH

Brooks Agnew, a physicist and futurist from Kentucky, plans to board the Russian icebreaker *Yamal* in the port of Murmansk in about May 2008, and sail just beyond Canada's Arctic islands. He's looking for a fog-shrouded hole in the Arctic Ocean that, he says, leads to the centre of the Earth, where an unknown civilisation is lurking inside the hollow core of the planet.

The Hollow Earth idea has a pedigree stretching back to Sir Edmond Halley and Athanasius



GEOMETRY IN THE SKY
Red square at night revealed as a star-gazer's delight
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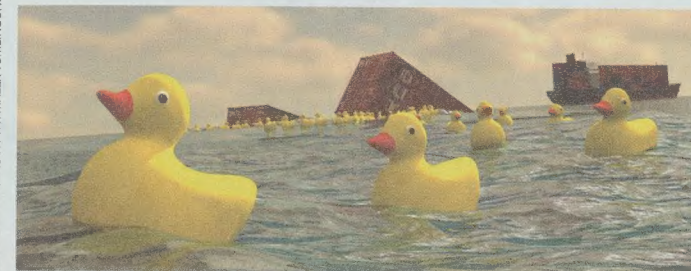
MYSTERY MOGGIES
Catnapping panics, winged felines and strange births
PAGE 14



ANCIENT DEATH RAY
Did Archimedes really set the Roman fleet ablaze?
PAGE 16

Ducks ahoy!!

After 15 years adrift, flotsam convoy heads for Britain



ALEXANDER TOMLINSON WWW.ALEXANDERTOMLINSON.COM

A flotilla of plastic bath toys is heading for Britain's beaches, according to American oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer, who has been tracking them for the past 15 years. They began life in a Chinese factory and were being shipped to the US from Hong Kong when 20 (or 12) containers fell into the Pacific from a cargo ship during a storm on 29 (or 10) January 1992 (FT177:10). At least one container was forced open, spilling its cargo of 29,000 plastic 2in (5cm) bath toys – yellow ducks,

red beavers, green frogs and blue turtles. Two thirds of them floated south through the tropics, landing months later on the shores of Indonesia, Australia and South America. Meanwhile, 10,000 headed north and by November that year were off Alaska and heading back westwards. It took three years for the ducks to circle east to Japan, past the original drop site and then back to Alaska on a current known as the North Pacific Gyre before continuing north towards the Arctic. Many were stranded as the currents took them through

the Bering Strait.

Ebbesmeyer correctly predicted what many thought was impossible – that thousands of them would end up frozen in Arctic pack ice and then move at a mile a day around their very own North-West Passage to the Atlantic. It proved true in 2000 when the first intrepid toys were found off Greenland. Soon they were sighted bobbing in the waves from Maine to Massachusetts. Some are expected to reach Britain after a journey of 20,000 miles (32,000km), having crossed the Atlantic on the Gulf Stream. Any beachcomber who finds one, stamped with the words "The First Years", will be able to claim a \$100 (£50) savings bond reward, offered since 2003 by the toys' American distributor, First Years Inc. Sun and seawater have bleached the ducks and beavers white, but the turtles should still be blue and the frogs green. Sightings in the past two years have been scant, but Ebbesmeyer believes that their next port of call is southwest England, southern Ireland and western Scotland.

One advance scout made it well in advance of the main flotilla. In 2003, a lawyer called Sonali

Naik, on holiday in the Hebrides off north-west Scotland, found a faded green frog on the beach marked with the magic words "The First Years". Unaware of the significance of her find, she left it on the beach. It was only when she was chatting to other guests at her hotel that she realised what she had seen.

In April 2004, FT reader Dave Miles sent us this limerick:

*They travel the wide ocean blue,
An adventurous, durable crew.
But please do forgive them,
'Cos you can't go with them,
Unless you're a plastic duck too.*

The landfalls have all been logged on a computer model called the Ocean Surface Currents Simulation, which is used to help fisheries and find people lost at sea. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) worked out that the ducks travel approximately 50 per cent faster than the water in the current. Two children's books have been written about the saga and the plastic toys have become collector's items, changing hands for £500 or more. *D.Mail*, 27 Jun, 24 Jul; *Times*, 28 Jun 2007.

HOLY GRAIL

Italian archaeologist Alfredo Barbaggio claims the Holy Grail is buried in a chapel-like room underneath the Basilica of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, one of the seven churches that Christian pilgrims used to visit when they came to Rome. He bases his claim on his study of mediæval iconography inside the basilica and a description of a particular chamber in a 1938 guide to the catacombs by Giuseppe Da Bra, a Capuchin friar. Da Bra describes a room of about 215 sq ft (20 sq m) with a vaulted roof. "In the corner of a wall-seat there can be seen a terracotta funnel whose lower part opens out over the face of a skeleton," he wrote. He then explains that giving liquid refreshment (*refrigerium*) to the dead was part of ancient funeral rites. Barbaggio, who heads an association called *Arte e Mistero* (Art and Mystery), maintains that this funnel is the

Enthusiasts seek the Grail here, there & everywhere

Grail, and points out that several mosaics and frescos in the basilica feature images of a sacred cup.

In AD 258, during a phase of Christian persecution, Pope Sixtus V is said to have entrusted the treasures of the early Church to a deacon called Lorenzo, who was martyred four days later. Barbaggio believes the treasures (including the Grail) were buried with St Lorenzo. Emperor Constantine built a shrine on the site of Lorenzo's martyrdom in the 4th century and the main part of the basilica was built in AD 580 on

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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Arab News, 18 Nov 2006.

Express derailed by Jesus

National Student, Dec 2006.

Teenager held over shredder

Edinburgh Eve. News, 13 Dec 2006.

Skeletons go out of fashion

D.Mail, 24 Jan 2007.

Inflatable terror girl's hero gong

London Paper, 20 Nov 2006.

Giants could set up shop on country sites

D.Mail, 6 Dec 2006.

Elf police nab drivers

Shropshire Star, 9 Dec 2006.

Men in black sparked pub panic as they opened fire

Aberdeen Press & Journal, 11 Nov 2006.



PLATINUM PEACOCK

Viewed as a sign of good luck by visitors to China's Harbin Zoo, this pure white peacock treated onlookers to a dazzling display of his magnificent tail feathers. The peacock is one of two rare white male birds which have lived at the zoo for the last two years. For a true albino peacock, see **FT180:7**. *D. Mail, 18 Apr 2007.*

PHOTO: WENN

ORPHANED OWLS

These five baby owls have found a new mum in the shape of a cuddly toy. The tawny owl chicks were found crying for their lost parents and brought to the New Forest Otter, Owl and Wildlife Sanctuary near Southampton, where they were provided with a surrogate soft-toy parent to minimise the risk of them imprinting on humans.

PHOTO: SOLENT / CHRIS BALCOMBE



THE AVIARY VARIATIONS

More white ravens claim sanctuary

In previous eras, they would have been seen as a significant portent of some kind. Three rare white ravens were found starving in the churchyard at All Saints church in Bishop Auckland, County Durham. The fledglings are thought to have been abandoned by their parents when crows attacked their nest. They were taken into care at Wearside Animal Sanctuary. Manager Sally Rowley said the fledglings – named Tic, Tac, and Toe – were “skin and bone and were just sitting, not moving. They just sat in a bush and you could pick them off, like an apple.” Two years ago, another starving white raven was found in the same churchyard.

D. Mail, Times, 12 Jun 2007.

PHOTO: NORTH NEWS & PICTURES

A four-legged, three-legged friend

Nicky Janaway got a surprise when she was inspecting the hatching sheds at Warrawee Duck Farm in the New Forest back in February. Picking up a duckling to sex it, she was amazed to find that the youngster had an extra set of limbs: “I tucked his legs away and then found two more. I kept counting ‘one, two, three, four’. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing.”

Christened Stumpy, the lucky ducky was adopted by the Janaway family as a pet, provided with his own pen and a female companion called Alice. By April, Stumpy had grown into a healthy adult, taken his first swim (in a paddling pool) and found fame in newspapers and on the Internet. While Stumpy’s extra legs at first seemed to cause him no difficulties, one of them eventually had to be amputated after it was caught in a fence; but a three-legged duck is still pretty special.

D. Mail, Metro, D. Telegraph, 4 Apr; [R] 18 Apr 2007.

PHOTO: REUTERS



SIDELINES...

OUTLOOK GLOOMY

On 21 May, pilgrims rushed to a village in the Dolakha district of Nepal, 43 miles (70km) east of the capital Kathmandu, after reports that a Hindu idol was sweating – an ill omen. The statue of Bhimeswor, the god of trade, last broke into a sweat in May 2001, days before the crown prince killed the king [FT149:12]. It also sweated prior to a massive earthquake in 1934, and again last year during street protests that forced King Gyanendra to relinquish direct rule. *BBC News*, 21 May; *D.Telegraph*, 22 May 2007.

SLY SNIPPING

At least two women in Burma with long ponytails have had them cut off in crowded areas, recalling the waves of hair-snipping familiar in the Far East [see FT177:42-46]. The blame has fallen on "surreptitious snippers who steal hair to sell as extensions". *Metro*, 14 May 2007.

MONOPOLY MENU

Steven Guinness, 21, a creative writing student from Southport, Merseyside, has eaten Marmite for breakfast, lunch and dinner since he was two. He consumes more than a pound of the yeast extract every week and has never had a hot meal. He drinks nothing but Ribena (blackcurrant juice). *Times*, 24 Feb 2007.

LUCKY BREAK

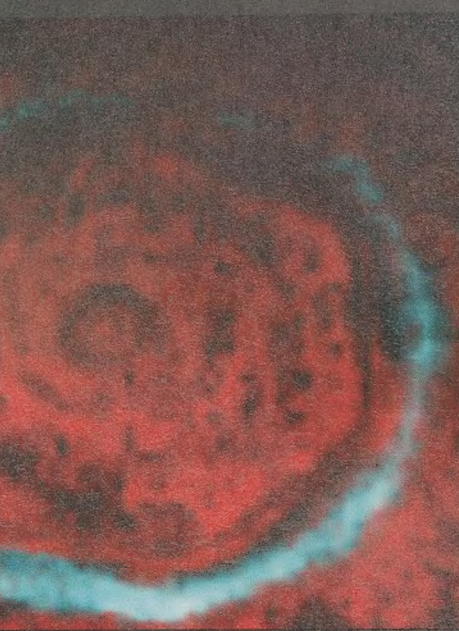
Two Japanese climbers, a man and a woman, were killed as they descended Mount Cook, New Zealand, on 24 January, but a third climber was saved. Meguru Inoue, 31, was abseiling down the mountain below her companions when a rock they were all anchored to gave way, starting a landslide and plunging her and Takao Futono, 52, nearly 500m (1,640ft) to their deaths. The third climber, a 28-year-old man, survived when a falling rock severed the rope connecting him to the others, and saved him from being pulled down with them. [DPA] 26 Jan 2007.

CELESTIAL SYMMETRY

Saturn's bizarre hexagon lingers on

One of the most bizarre weather patterns ever encountered was photographed on Saturn by NASA's Cassini mission during a 12-day period beginning on 30 October last year. Rather than the normally sinuous cloud structures seen on all planets that have atmospheres, this thing is a hexagon circling the planet's entire north pole. It is nearly 15,000 miles (24,000km) across – nearly four Earths could fit inside it. The honeycomb-like feature was recorded by Voyagers 1 and 2 over 20 years ago, indicating that it is a long-lived oddity. A second, significantly darker, hexagon is also visible in the Cassini pictures. The spacecraft's infrared mapping spectrometer is the first instrument to capture the entire hexagon feature in one image.

"This is a very strange feature, lying in a precise geometric fashion with six nearly equally straight sides," said Kevin Baines, atmospheric expert and member of Cassini's visual and infrared mapping spectrometer team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California. "We've never seen anything like this on any other planet. Indeed, Saturn's thick atmosphere where circularly shaped waves and convective cells dominate is perhaps the last



leader of the Cassini visual and infrared mapping spectrometer at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

The hexagon has not been visible to Cassini's visual cameras because of the long polar night, which lasts about 15 years. The infrared mapping spectrometer captured the feature during a 12-day period beginning on 30 October last year. As Saturn's night wanes

"We've never seen anything like this on any planet"

place you'd expect to see such a six-sided geometric figure, yet there it is."

The new images taken in thermal-infrared light show the hexagon extends much deeper down into the atmosphere than previously expected, some 60 miles (100km) below the cloud tops. A system of clouds within the hexagon appears to be whipping around like cars on a racetrack. At the south pole, Cassini recently spotted a freaky human eye-like feature that resembles a hurricane. "It's amazing to see such striking differences on opposite ends of Saturn's poles," said Bob Brown, team

over the next two years, the feature may become visible to the visual cameras. Based on the new images and more information on the depth of the feature, scientists think it is not linked to Saturn's radio emissions or to auroral activity, as once contemplated, even though Saturn's northern aurora lies nearly overhead. The hexagon appears to have remained fixed with Saturn's rotation rate and axis since first glimpsed by Voyager 26 years ago. The actual rotation rate of Saturn is still uncertain, which means nobody knows exactly how long the planet's day is. "Once we understand its dynamical nature," said Baines, "this long-lived, deep-seated polar hexagon may give us a clue to the true rotation rate of the deep atmosphere and perhaps the interior." *Science Daily*, *SPACE.com*, 27 Mar 2007. Adapted from a news release issued by NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

'Super-Earth'

Astronomers have found the most Earth-like planet to date, orbiting the faint star Gliese 581, which is 20.5 light years (about 120 million million miles) away in the constellation Libra. "We have estimated that the mean temperature of this 'super-Earth' lies between 0° and 40° Celsius [32° to 104°F], and water would thus be liquid," said Stéphane Udry of the Geneva Observatory, lead author of the paper announcing the discovery. "Moreover, its radius should be only 1.5 times the Earth's radius, and models predict that the planet should be either rocky – like our Earth – or covered with oceans." The presence of liquid water raises the chances it could harbour life – or life as we know it. Telescopes in space should be able to discern the telltale light 'signatures' (for instance of methane or chlorophyll) that might be associated with biological processes.

The exoplanet (as planets around a star other than our Sun are



known) – the smallest yet found – is designated Gliese 581c and was found using Harps (High Accuracy Radial Velocity for Planetary Searcher), an instrument on a 12ft (3.6m) Southern Observatory telescope at La Silla in the Chilean Andes. It is 14 times closer to its star than the Earth is to our Sun, and completes a full orbit every 13 days. However, the host star is much smaller and colder than our Sun – hence the life-friendly temperature range. The Gliese 581 system has now yielded three planets: the new super-Earth, a 15 Earth-

mass planet orbiting even closer to the parent star, and an eight Earth-mass planet that lies further out. Of the 213 exoplanets discovered in the last 12 years, most are Jupiter-like gas giants that experience blazing temperatures, thought to be inimical to life because they orbit close to their hot stars. Following the announcement of Gliese 581c's discovery, bookmakers William Hill cut the odds on the discovery of aliens from 1,000/1 to 100/1. *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, *Int. Herald Tribune*, 25 April; *D.Telegraph*, 25+26 April 2007.

A Red Square in space

This image (right) of clouds of interstellar gas enveloping a distant star looks like a cluster of rubies set in a perfect jewel. Astronomers have christened it the "Red Square", recalling the work of art of the same name (below right) painted by pioneering abstract artist Kasimir Malevich in 1913. Peter Tuthill, an astrophysicist at Sydney University, and James Lloyd of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, found the previously unknown celestial object while studying a well-known star called MWC 922, roughly 5,000 light years away in the constellation Serpens.

"It's so nearly square that people probably mistook it for an aberration of the telescope," said Dr Tuthill. "It looks a bit like two wine

glasses facing away from each other. It's almost as if aliens assembled it out of bits of Meccano." It was found using new imaging technology called adaptive optics, first developed during the 1980s Star Wars project. Astronomers have refined it so that it removes the shimmering effect from the movement of air between a telescope and an observed object, which can blur an image. By combining extremely high-resolution, near-infrared images of the star – taken by telescopes in California and Hawaii – Tuthill and Lloyd realised that MWC 922 was the core of a bipolar nebula, similar to one known as the "Red Rectangle", discovered 30 years ago. *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, 13 April; *Independent*, 14 April 2007.



SIDELINES...

WINNING SLOGAN

Charles Taylor, the deposed strongman of Sierra Leone currently on trial for war crimes at The Hague, fought an election campaign in 1997 with the slogan: "I killed your ma, I killed your pa, you will vote for me." *Independent*, 4 June 2007.

PULLING THE WOOL

Actress Maiko Kawakami went on a Tokyo talk show in April and said she'd heard of someone who had bought a "poodle" (selling in Japan for up to £1,260), which turned out to be a lamb. Soon after, a story raced round the world via the wire services that "as many as 2,000 wealthy Japanese women" had been conned into buying lambs clipped to look like miniature poodles, the latest must-have pet. *D.Express*, 27 April; *Guardian*, 28 April; *Independent on Sunday*, 6 May 2007.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

The Shropshire hamlet of Betton Strange has achieved national fame in the game launched by UKVillages.co.uk called Valid Village or Hoax Hamlet. The hamlet dates from the 11th century and was built on land given to a Norman knight, Homo le Strange, by William the Conqueror. *Shropshire Star*, 11 April 2007.

WATCH DRIFTS SOUTH

Niels Jakup Mortensen, 11, spotted a black box on the beach near his home on Suduroy, the Faeroes' southernmost island. Inside was a watch that had been buried in the ice at the North Pole, 1,800 miles (2,900km) away, three years earlier by Joergen Amundsen, a descendant of Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen. The watch still worked and was accompanied by a letter from Amundsen, who had designed the watch to withstand Arctic conditions. He is reported to have said that the boy could keep the watch, one of only 250 produced. [AP] *D.Mail*, 30 Mar 2007.



SIDELINES...

RENT-A-PILGRIM

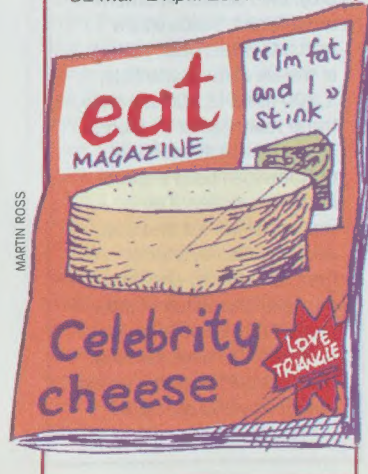
Good news for Catholics who can't fulfil a pledge to make the pilgrimage to Fatima in Portugal. For €2,500 (£1,673), Pilgrim Gil will make the journey in your place and send a certificate of proof. *Sunday Mail*, 5 Nov 2006.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Police in Shuangcheng city, Heilongjiang province, China, were baffled when DNA evidence suggested the same man had committed two break-ins and rapes in different parts of the city at the same time. The Central Ministry of Public Security suggested the crimes had been committed by identical twins. Police arrested Fan Yehe in connection with a separate rape, and learned he had a twin. The brothers confessed to both crimes. *The Australian*, 19 Feb 2007.

ROT SETS IN

On 29 March, tens of thousands of cheese lovers logged on to www.cheddarvision.tv to witness a thrilling moment when something actually happens: a 44lb (20kg) round of cheddar cheese in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, underwent its first quality check. Over the previous three months, more than half a million logged on to watch it as it matured. The cheese will mature until next January. It is currently whitish-grey, but is expected to develop into the colour of an old gravestone. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 Mar-1 April 2007.



Awakened at long last...

Patients are revived after many years of semi-consciousness



MISSING THE FALL

At the beginning of June, most papers carried the story of Polish railway worker Jan Grzebski, 65, (pictured above with his wife) who had fallen into a coma on 4 September 1988 after being hit by a train and woke up last April, after 19 years. All that time, he had been looked after by his wife Gertruda, who had turned him over three times a day to prevent him getting bed sores.

The case had echoes of the 2003 German film, *Goodbye Lenin!*, in which an East German woman wakes from a coma after the fall of the Berlin wall. Mr Grzebski, from Dzialdowo in northern Poland, awoke to find his four children had married and produced 11 grandchildren. He had vague memories of family gatherings that he was taken to, and of his family trying to communicate with him.

Mr Grzebski's head had been crushed by rail buffers

A couple of days later, it transpired that the story had been exaggerated. Mr Grzebski's head had been crushed by the buffers between two carriages and he was lucky to survive. For two weeks he continued to go to work. Then he fainted with a massive blood clot in his head and was rushed to hospital where doctors told his wife he was effectively dead. But he was never comatose – he was conscious, albeit immobile, bedridden and unable to talk. He was paralysed

and suffering from aphasia, a loss of ability to produce or comprehend language. His isolation from society beyond his immediate family was absolute. He couldn't be taken out in a wheelchair because he could not stop his head lolling or his limbs flopping about.

Only in September 2006, when he got pneumonia and was seen by doctors, did a rehabilitation specialist decide to attempt treatment. Within weeks, he began to speak, raise his arms and sit straight in his wheelchair. One thing was not exaggerated – his shock at the dramatic changes in Poland since 1988, when it was still a Communist state. *Times*, 4 June; *(Dublin) Metro*, 6 June; *Guardian*, 9 June 2007.

AWAKE AFTER SIX YEARS

A Colorado woman who went into a vegetative state more than six years ago awoke for three days earlier this year and spoke with her family and a local television station before slipping back. "I'm fine," Christa Lilly, 49, told her mother on 4 March, her first words in eight months. She had awakened four other times for briefer periods since suffering a heart attack and stroke in 2000. She got to see her youngest daughter, Chelsey, now 12, and three grandchildren. Before her relapse on 7 March, Lilly said her biggest frustration was having to learn again how to talk. Randall Bjork, one of her neurologists in Colorado Springs, said he couldn't explain how she awoke. She has now reverted to a vegetative state, but she is not comatose. Doctors describe her condition as "minimally conscious". Her eyes are wide open, but they focus on the ceiling all day and her body is rigid. She cannot walk or communicate, has no awareness and has to be fed through a tube into her stomach. The longest recorded persistent vegetative state lasted more than 37 years. For other cases, see FT72:23-29, 132:20, 175:9. *Guardian*, *USA Today*, 9 Mar 2007.

How to live without sleep

A new attempt is made on the record for staying awake



APENewsPix.com / CHRIS SAWILL

In a bid to beat the world record, Tony Wright, 43 (pictured above), a horticulturalist and amateur sleep researcher, stayed awake for 266 hours between 14 and 25 May. The record he broke – of 11 days or 264 hours – was set in 1964 in San Diego, California, by Randy Gardner, a 17-year-old student, and is recognised in psychiatric textbooks. However, Mr Wright was unaware that Toimi Soini allegedly stayed awake for 11.5 days, or 276 hours, in Hamina, Finland, between 5 and 15 February in 1964. This datum featured in the *Guinness Book of Records* until 1989, when it was deleted on the grounds that it could encourage records harmful to health and was unverifiable because of the claims of insomnia sufferers. (Other records deleted from *Guinness* include sword swallowing – too dangerous; heaviest cat – unethical; and eating and drinking – could lead to litigation).

"Our main concern was not the record but to show that Tony could train his mind in such a way as to stay awake for 11 days and remain coherent and aware of what was going on around him," said Mr Wright's friend Graham Gynn. "Tony not only stayed awake but handled 10 media interviews a day." Mr Wright, a

Wright saw dancing pixies and elves on his screen

father of three, stayed awake with the help of friends at the Studio Bar in his hometown of Penzance in Cornwall. He passed the time playing pool and talking to a stream of visitors, although as the days passed his speech became slower and slower. He ate raw food – including fruit, salad, seeds and nuts – drank herb tea and eschewed all artificial stimulants. Six CCTV cameras and a webcam were trained on him the entire time in case he attempted a surreptitious nap.

Before finally going to sleep, he said: "My diet of raw food made it much easier to switch from one side of the brain, which is really tired, to the other, but both are pretty tired at the moment. I do feel very strange. Everything around me has become more intense and after a while colours seem brighter. My eyes have become very sensitive. I started wearing sunglasses after 70 hours because looking at a laptop was

sending me into a trance... I did this to show the accepted theory is wrong and the brain does not become less effective with tiredness. I believe there are different sleep requirements for the two different sides of the brain and as the left side becomes fatigued it loses its ability to stay in charge." After five days, he recorded in his online diary that he saw "giggling dancing pixies and elves" appearing on his computer screen. *BBC News*, 25 May; *Times*, *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, *Guardian*, 26 May 2007.

Of course, insomnia sufferers claim to have gone without sleep for much longer periods. In 2006, for instance, Hai Ngoc, a Vietnamese farmer, said he had not slept for 33 years. It all began with a high fever he suffered in 1973. He had tried drink, sleeping pills and traditional medicines, but nothing worked, even for a few minutes. Equally remarkable, his health seemed unimpaired by more than 11,700 sleepless nights. Phan Ngoc Ha, director of the local psychiatric hospital, said that Hai Ngoc seemed to be one of those rare insomniacs who needs no sleep at all. *Independent on Sunday*, 19 Feb 2006.

Several long-term insomniacs live in Vietnam, including Nguyen Thi Tu (awake for 32 years); Thi Le Hang, 55 (32 yrs); and Nguyen Hang (31 yrs). All stayed awake for roughly the same number of years – could there be an element of contemporary legend at work here? Other insomniacs noted in these pages include Song Shikuan, 71, from China's Henan province (51 yrs); Tomas Izquierdo, 53, from Cuba (41 yrs); Inez Fernandez, 57, from Spain (30+ yrs); Fyodor Nesterchuk, 63, from Ukraine (20+ yrs); and Maria Stelica, 54, from Romania (8 yrs). Izquierdo was kept under 24-hour observation for two weeks in 1970. Even when he lay down to rest, ECGs registered the brain activity of a fully awake person. See FT1:14, 49:29, 100:16, 132:20, 182:9, 197:10.

SIDELINES...

COUNTING CHICKEN

Xhi-Xhi (or Guai Guai), a chicken from Shenyang in the northeast Chinese province of Jilin, has a flair for arithmetic. Her owner, Mrs Li, gives her hours of abacus and number recognition practice. She responds to addition and subtraction questions by nodding her beak at the correct answer. She can also recognise the 26 letters of the Western alphabet and distinguish between car makes and national flags. *Independent on Sunday*, 11 Feb; *D.Express*, 2 Mar 2007.

A BITE ON THE SIDE

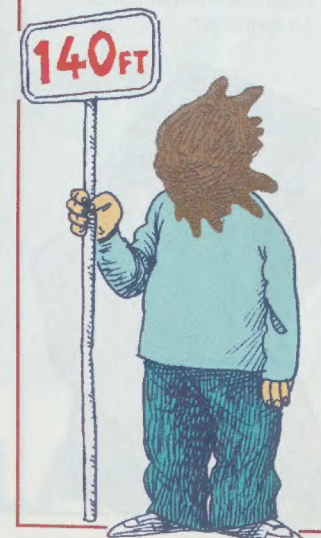
A man called Chew Kok is awaiting trial accused of running a brothel in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. *News of the World*, 20 Mar 2007.

PSYCHIC FREEZE

Lost dog Fizz, stuck in a rabbit hole for four days, was found in 10 minutes by Margaret Carne, 62, a psychic. The terrier's owner, Karen Baugh of Newark, Nottinghamshire, six helpers and three dogs, had all passed the same spot many times. But Ms Carne said: "My body just froze there." *News of the World*, 22 April 2007.

ORDURE, ORDURE

James Pratt has won the world cowpat hurling championship in Beaver, Oklahoma – with a throw of almost 140ft (43m). The record is 158ft (48m). *Sun*, 9 May 2007.



SIDELINES...

MACABRE PARCEL

A Romanian woman opened a banana crate she had been sent and found the bones of her father, Rafaila Cojocaru, 62. He had died in 1990, and was buried in Darvari, but when the cemetery was sold to developers, his body was exhumed and sent to his daughter Aurelia Cenusă, 37, in Severin, 300 miles (480km) away. "It's outrageous," she said. "You could still see bits of funeral suit." *Sun*, 29 Nov; *Metro*, 30 Nov 2006.

HIT AND MISS

Moments after opening an unexpected payment demand for £100 from British Gas, tattoo artist Lee Armitage, 26, of Torquay, Devon, cracked open a fortune cookie from a Chinese meal the night before, to read: "British Gas Has Made a Mistake - You will get a rebate." Alas, it was a false prediction. Although Mr Armitage had switched gas supplier, British Gas insisted he really did owe them the money, unpaid from when he was a customer last year. The cookie was made by Lotus Fortune Cookies based in Enfield, Middlesex. *Metro*, *Sun*, 20 April 2007.

MOTHER'S MOLARS

A South African man desperate for a visit from the spirit of his dead mother was convicted by a court on 17 April of violating her grave by extracting teeth from her skull. *Queensland Times*, 18 April 2007.



MARTIN ROSS

Cetation mystery solved

The long-forgotten Barnsley whale is tracked down at last



ALBANPIX.COM

In 2000, advertising copywriter Steve Deput recalled seeing a huge preserved whale on the back of a lorry in his home town of Barnsley in South Yorkshire in the late 1960s. A message on the Barnsley Football Club website produced mocking responses - but then someone else remembered, so he knew he wasn't dreaming. Though the exhibit had travelled all over Europe, it seemed to have escaped the notice of journalists. Eventually, he found a photograph of the travelling attraction in a Sheffield archive. Jonah the Giant Whale, as it was called, arrived in Dagenham in March 1954 and was exhibited all over the country. The 70-ton creature, 65ft (20m) long, had been caught by Norwegian whalers in September 1952. Preserving it was a major undertaking: 500 gallons (7,000 litres) of blood were replaced with a formalin solution and a liver weighing the equivalent of six cars was removed. Its spine and ribs were fastened to a steel frame to support the weight of the carcass and contain a refrigeration system. But what had happened to the giant exhibit?

The story appeared in the *Daily*

People said you could smell it all over town

Express in January 2006, where it was read by circus owner Mike Austin, who said that Jonah was still in existence. "It was originally caught for the University of Trondheim in Norway," he recalled, "but a Swiss company got hold of it and thought it had good money-making potential. It went to Japan for two years and South Africa and all over Europe. In the Fifties it toured Britain with the Bertram Mills Circus, but when it came back later [in the late Sixties] I was asked to move it around." He ran a team of eight men who toured the whale from the south coast up to Aberdeen. It was sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund, which issued leaflets at the exhibition and received a cut of the takings. "It's funny how some things get twisted in people's memories," he said. "There are

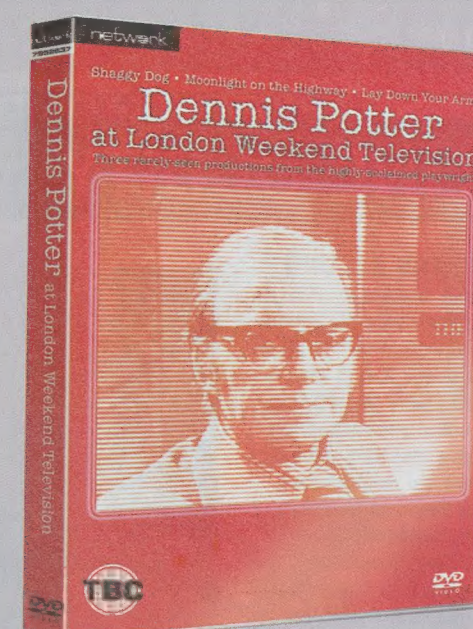
people saying you could smell it all over the town, but I lived next door to it and even though the refrigeration unit never worked, there was never any smell."

The son of the original Swiss owner had mothballed Jonah (so to speak) after a final tour in Finland in 1980. He died in 2006, leaving the whale to a former Dutch ice skater called Albert. Last December, Mr Deput, Mr Austin and a film crew went to see Jonah in his immense custom-built truck - at 100ft (30m) long, twice the size of any vehicle on British motorways - in a remote warehouse on the border between Belgium and Germany. "They pulled back the covers and there was the whale," said Mr Deput. "It was stunning to be able to climb up and look in its mouth. It was still in a shabby state but it hadn't deteriorated since I saw it last. Seeing it again was beyond belief." He now intends to try and raise a five-figure sum to buy Jonah from Albert and introduce him to a new generation. To order a copy of Steve Deput's book, *The Barnsley Whale* or contact the author, go to: www.bigwhaleonallorry.com. *D.Express*, 14 April 2007.



WAY TO THE STARS

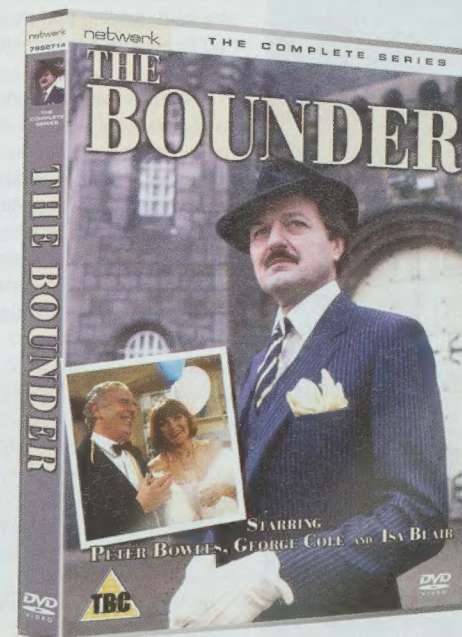
An outstanding example of the British war movie at its best, this stars Michael Redgrave and John Mills and is set between the Battle of Britain in 1940 and the handover of the air force base to Americans in 1943. New to DVD.



DENNIS POTTER AT LWT VOLUME 2

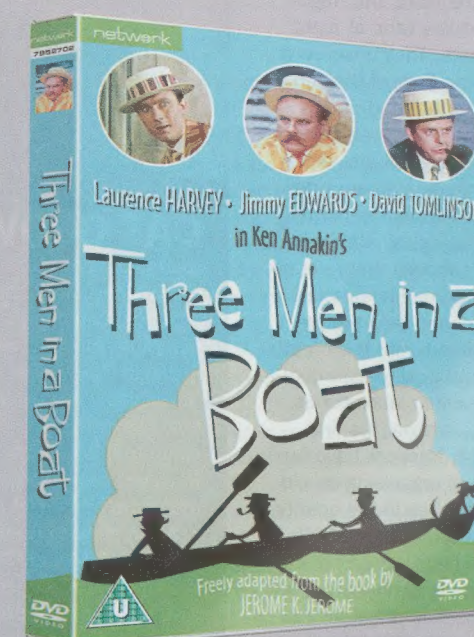
Three of the writer's most powerful plays, originally shown on ITV, that have not been seen in any format for nearly forty years.

august releases



THE BOUNDER THE COMPLETE SERIES

Peter Bowles is caddish ex-con Howard who moves in with his sister and her put-upon husband Trevor (George Cole). All 14 episodes are here on DVD complete and uncut for the first time.



THREE MEN IN A BOAT

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FELINE ODDITY

Alien Big Cats aren't the only mystery moggies on the block. *Fortean Times* rounds up some more anomalies from around the globe.

CATNAPPERS RETURN

Last summer, black and white buckets appeared on the streets of Veert and Kerken in the Rhineland. According to labels on the buckets, they were for collecting old clothes and shoes, but why did they have fist-sized holes in them? Some cat owners speculated that these were vents to allow the transportation of kidnapped cats. According to the text on the buckets, the collection was on behalf of a charity called 'Hope', but this could not be found on the Internet or through directory inquiries. The phone number on the bucket didn't connect to anyone.

According to a contemporary legend widespread in Germany, cat trappers are behind many such charity collections. Their methods are described by a Mrs Eva Schade-Tomala on her Internet site *Katzerei.com*, cited by *Rheinische Post*. The trappers park delivery vans at night in side streets. They unscrew a plate from the floor of the van and place on the road underneath an unspecified object extremely attractive to cats. When the poor animals gather under the van, the fiendish trappers spray a nerve agent into their eyes, which knocks them unconscious and sometimes makes them blind. Then they are put into the buckets with the breathing vents and sold to skin dealers and research laboratories.

Allegedly, it is not the first time that cat trappers have been suspected of organising an old clothes collection in the county of Kleve. In September 2002, a remarkably large number of cats disappeared in Bedburg-Hau and Goch at the time of an alleged collection for the "Red Ring" charity. The charity stated at the time that they had not organised a collection in that area.

In January 2007, residents of Berlin were advised to lock up their cats amid rumours that they were being stolen and sold to fur traders and vivisectionists. The city's animal protection society said it had been getting calls from people in two districts of



CAT GROWS WINGS

Granny Lu Feng's tomcat (above) has sprouted two hairy 4in (10cm)-long wings, according to the *Huashang News*. "At first, they were just two bumps, but they started to grow quickly, and after a month there were two wings," said Feng, of Xianyang city, Shaanxi province. The wings, which contain bones, make her pet look like a "cat angel". Her explanation is that the cat sprouted the wings after being sexually harassed. "A month ago, many female cats in heat came to harass him, and then the wings started to grow," she said. However, experts say the phenomenon is more likely down to a gene mutation, and say it shouldn't prevent the cat living a normal life.

Attempting to remove a cat's 'wings' may be more dangerous to the animal than leaving them intact: a cat, living in Wiveliscombe in Somerset at the end of the 19th century, had its 'wings' cut off with fatal consequences. The appendages, gristly rather than flabby to the touch, were approximately 8in (20cm) long, and positioned



SOMERSET WINGED CAT c. 1899

exactly where a bird's wings would be. Strangely, they even "flapped about like the wings of a scurrying chicken" whenever the cat moved. *Ananova*, 23 May 2007.

For other cats with wings, see FT78:32-33, 168:48-49.

southwestern Berlin who thought their cats might have been stolen.

"People have noticed vans with dark windows," said Marcel Gading, spokesman for the society. "One could assume that has something to do with it. You see a lot of women walking around town wearing coats with beautiful fur collars. In many cases it's synthetic fur but it's also often cat fur. Many people don't realise what they're wearing around their necks. For all they know it could be their own missing cat." He said around 2,500 of Berlin's 300,000 cats vanish every year and that around 500 are "unexplained disappearances".

Gabriele Groh, who lives in the Grünau district of Berlin, told the *Berliner Zeitung* that three cats had vanished from her housing estate in January, including her own red-and-white tomcat Mecki. "That can't be a coincidence," she said, adding that the cat had been with her for eight years.

Is there a cat-snatching gang supplying felids to animal research laboratories and glove-makers in Germany, eastern Europe or Asia? Not according to Steffen Seckler, spokesman for Germany's national Animal Protection Society in Bonn.

"There are rumours and we take them seriously," he said. "We've had countless calls from people asking about this, but we think it's highly unlikely. Thousands of animals disappear each year and anything might have happened to them - they could have been run over, shot by hunters, or got stuck somewhere they couldn't escape from."

In the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia alone, 17,895 cats were shot by hunters in the 2002/2003 season, and those are only the ones the region's hunting federation will admit to, said Seckler. "We can't rule out organised theft, but there's no evidence of it. Besides, it just doesn't make sense to argue that cats are being caught for laboratories that are far more likely to breed their own animals

for the purpose. And I can't imagine cat-catching being an economically feasible way to supply the clothing industry when thousands of animals are bred and processed in China and turned into jackets, trousers, shoes, and stuffed toys, which is the height of perversion." Police in Munich launched an investigation into what it called "organised animal theft" two years ago, but found no proof.

Germany legally imports an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 cat furs per year, mostly from China and Korea, but the European Commission in Brussels has drafted legislation to ban the trade throughout the European Union.

Campaigners claim around two million cats and dogs are slaughtered annually for their fur and skins in Asia each year, and that breeders strangle their cats slowly to prevent damaging the fur.

Cats are used to make gloves and hats, coat and jacket linings. Their fur also adorns trousers and shoes, and is turned into "rheumatic blankets" and kidney warmers. Thousands of dog skins are also imported. *Rheinische Post*, 2 Aug 2006; [R] *Der Spiegel*, 24 Jan 2007. For cat-trapping scarelore in the UK, see FT103:14, 132:8.



CAT HAS A PUPPY?

People in China flocked to Zhengzhou City to see a cat that had allegedly given birth to three kittens and a puppy. Its owner said the cat had had previous litters, but had never given birth to a dog before. Whether it's a dog-faced kitten or an actual puppy that has been slipped in there for the photo is anyone's guess. For another report of a cat giving birth to kittens, this time in Brazil, see FT219:22. *Guardian*, 28 Apr 2007.

BITCH HAS A KITTEN?

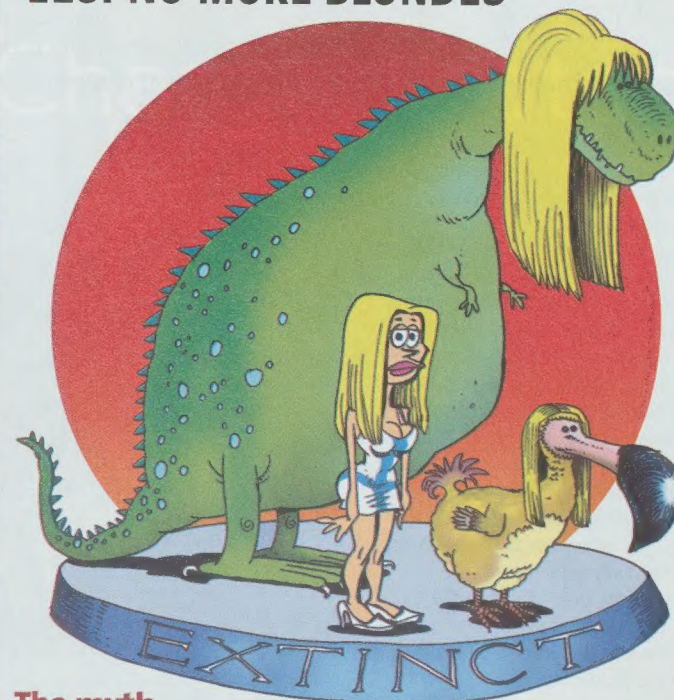
Hua Chengpeng, of Huayang village, Jiangyan city, told the Chinese paper *People's Daily* that the third 'puppy' in his pet's litter was a most unexpected arrival (below). "The first two puppies the dog produced were both normal, but when the third baby came, the whole family was very surprised to see a cat-like creature. It is a cat, not a dog at all," he said.

Local residents have been flocking to his house to see the 'kitten' which local vets say is really a puppy which looks like a cat because of a gene mutation. It apparently yaps like a puppy. Hua says his son brought the dog home from Liaoning city, where he had been working, a year ago. *Daily Times (Pakistan)*, 14 Jun 2007.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

113. NO MORE BLONDES



The myth

Natural blondes/blonds will be extinct within 200 years, according to research by the World Health Organisation. The last fair-haired human will be born in Finland.

The "truth"

In 2002, major newspapers and broadcasting organisations throughout the Anglophone world reported that blond people are dying out because blondness is carried by "a recessive gene," and because men prefer fake blondes, thus dooming the natural sort through natural selection. Sometimes this revelation is attributed to unnamed "experts", and is therefore palpably false; but often, it's claimed that the study was carried out by the WHO. In 2002, the WHO formally denied any knowledge of the supposed study - which hasn't stopped it being reported as news every year or so since. According to some fortaean bloggers, newspapers in the USA ran the "extinct blonde" story a century ago. A Pennsylvania paper apparently noted in 1907 that: "In about six hundred years the blonde will be a curiosity. She is to join the horse with five toes and the dodo."

Sources www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/statement05/en/; <http://paleo-future.blogspot.com/2007/05/blondes-to-be-extinct-1907.html>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2284783.stm>; www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/front/RTGAM/20021002/wblond1002/Front/homeBN/breakingnews.

Disclaimer A journalist who checks facts is proverbially as common as a donkey with 14 legs, but even so the ubiquity of this myth is amazing. Didn't anyone at the BBC, for instance, think, just for a moment, that the story might be too good to be true? Which makes me wonder if there is more to this than meets the eye. If any reader - whether geneticist, folklorist, journalist or healthcaucat - can fill in any blanks, please pass it all on to the letters page.

Update

When I was at school, I was taught that Henry VIII exploded in his tomb. I've since heard the same story applied to William I, Elizabeth I, and Cromwell. Can you lay this one to rest?



ARCHIMEDES AND THE DEATH RAY

Greek mathematical genius Archimedes used all his creative energies to repel the Roman siege of Syracuse – but could he really have set the fleet on fire to ward off the assault? **DAVID HAMBLING** examines the evidence.

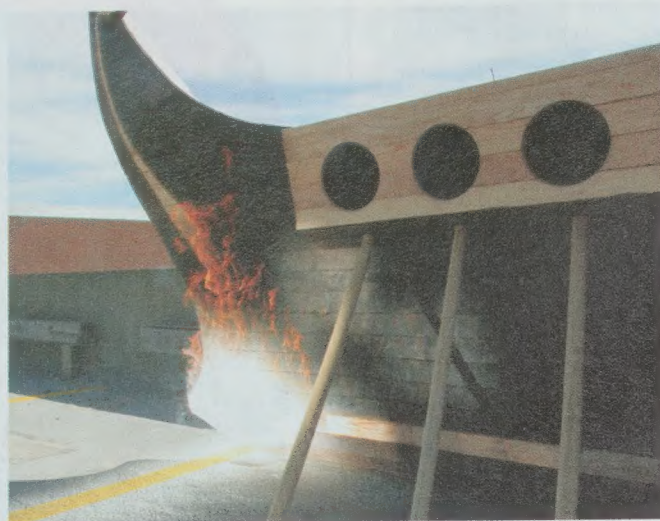
"If sunbeams were weapons of war, we would have had solar energy long ago" – Sir George Porter.

Some scientific controversies go on for years, some for decades. Few persist for millennia. One that did is the story of Archimedes's Death Ray.

During the siege of Syracuse in Sicily in 215–212 BC, the great mathematician and physicist Archimedes built a number of devices to fight off the Roman fleet. One argument centres on a particular device, an arrangement of mirrors which focused the sun's rays: "When the beams were reflected in the mirror, a fearful kindling of fire was raised in the ships, and at the distance of a bow-shot he turned them into ashes."¹

The truth of this story was accepted well into the 16th century. The great Scottish mathematician John Napier included a design for a burning mirror in his work on *Secrete Inventionis* for warfare. But by the 17th century, scientific opinion, including heavyweights like René Descartes, had turned against the idea. It's all a matter of optics, and the need for a parabolic mirror to focus on a small enough spot to achieve ignition. Athanasius Kircher later demonstrated that several flat mirrors could be used to concentrate sunlight – but many doubted whether wood could be burned this way.

In 1747, George Louis LeClerc, Comte De Buffon, assembled 168 small mirrors, each about eight by 10 inches (20 x 25cm). He found that he could ignite a creosoted plank almost 200ft (60m) away and could generate enough heat to melt tin.² This was not enough for the sceptics.



The general view would be that against a target such as a ship at a "bowshot range" it would take several hundred people all reflecting sunlight onto exactly the same spot, requiring too great a feat of coordination.

Others pointed out that accounts describing Archimedes using mirrors are not contemporary. Many thought that it was more likely that he burned the Roman ships with some kind of incendiary mixture (like the fabled Greek Fire) rather than mirrors. This was the prevailing view until the late 20th century; in 1961, one writer described the tale as "generally considered to be a work of pure fiction". However, by 1973 someone was willing to give it another go. Engineer and solar power expert Ioannis Sakkas enlisted the help of the Greek Navy to man 70 mirrors, each five feet by three (150 x 90cm). The mirrors were made of polished copper available in Archimedes's

time. The target was a small boat 50m (164ft) offshore. At first the mirror-handlers had trouble directing all the beams on the same spot; but as soon as they did, "the rowboat began smoking within two or three seconds. It was soon engulfed in flames".³

Sceptics were not convinced and felt that the demonstration was a set-up. Two scientists writing in the *European Journal of Physics* in 1992 carried out a mathematical analysis and ruled against it, on grounds that it would take over 400 men, each armed with a one-metre-square metal mirror: "This is such a poor use of manpower and resources that it is concluded this classic story is no more than a myth." Arguing that something could not have been done because it was a poor use of resources is certainly a new approach.

The practical experiments continued. In 2002, at a festival of 'Myth and Magic' in Osnabruck, Germany, 500 volunteers each with a 45cm (18in) square mirror succeeded in setting fire to a sail at a distance of 50m (164ft).⁴

The TV series *Mythbusters* claimed to have 'busted' the myth in 2005 when they failed to set fire to a target. However, some of the MIT students who had assisted them later tried their own experiment using 125 mirrored tiles each 1ft (30cm) square. They succeeded in setting a wooden

target on fire.⁵

More confirmation may also come from a much earlier source. A ninth-century treatise on burning mirrors was discovered in the collection of the Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait. This was a translation of an earlier Greek document on burning mirrors. According to this, the technology existed at the time to set light to objects 30 cubits (47ft / 14m) away with mirrors, and the engineers of the time were trying to meet the challenge of extending this to 100 cubits (157ft / 48m) by the application of geometry.⁶

Modern solar concentrators achieve very high temperatures – a forest of 600 mirrors is used in the first commercial solar power plant in Spain.⁷ But that doesn't mean that it could have been done 2,000 years ago.

One factor rarely taken into accounts is Archimedes himself, a remarkable engineer and inventor by any standards. He was also motivated: for him it was a matter of life or death rather than academic curiosity. He may have employed any number of modifications or work-arounds such as curved mirrors rather than flat ones; and he may have appreciated that psychological effects are more important than physical ones. The fear produced by seeing one ship bursting into flame would have kept most captains well away for some time afterwards and would have justified a great deal of effort.

So, if others find it hard to match Archimedes's feat, perhaps it's just because he was a genius and they are not.

NOTES

1 www.math.nyu.edu/~corres/Archimedes/Mirrors/Tzetzes.html.

2 www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mirrors.htm.

3 www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,908175,00.html.

4 www.zierath.de/movies/PM%20Mythen%20und%20Magie%2015-9-02.pdf.

5 web.mit.edu/2.009/www/experiments/deathray/10_ArchimedesResult.html.

6 www.trmkt.com/902manu.html.

7 www.treehugger.com/files/2007/05/seville_solar_s.php.

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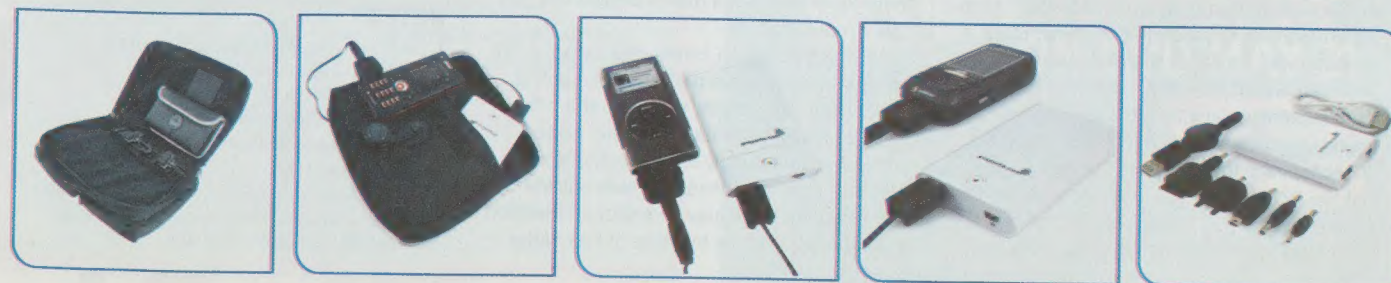
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KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER

A piece in the *Daily Telegraph* of 5 June, "7/7 bombs staged, say one in four Muslims", contained statistics on conspiratorial thinking among British Muslims. It reported that, as well as the 25 per cent who believed the London tube/bus bombings were staged, 60 per cent said the government has not told the truth about the bombings, and more than 50 per cent felt the security services had fabricated evidence to convict terror suspects. These figures, striking at first glance, diminish with a little reflection. Given what we know the State here and elsewhere has done – the now officially acknowledged cooperation with Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland to murder Catholics, for example – the belief that evidence is faked is no longer so far out a view. That the government hasn't told the whole truth about the 7/7 bombings is axiomatic: governments rarely tell us the whole truth about anything, and less and less as we approach their secret activities. But 25 per cent, even of a small (500) sample, believing that the 7/7 bombings were staged is interesting.

Conspiracy theories about 7/7 appeared almost immediately after the event, showing obvious analogies to, and inspiration from, the 9/11 theories. The thought that "this is very politically convenient" led to a scrutiny of the media reporting, and apparent anomalies were detected in the early, confused stories: a car seemingly following the bus which exploded; apparent difficulties with the official version of the bombers' train journeys; explosions apparently under the Tube carriages, and so on. The clinching piece of 'evidence' for the 7/7 conspiracy theorists was the statement by a British security company that it had been running an exercise in London at the time, using a scenario very similar to the actual bombings. This appeared to be confirmed – the man running the exercise rang BBC 5 Live to report this spooky coincidence – but this didn't stop the 7/7 conspiracy theorists from declaring: "It's just like 9/11. Exercises were run as cover for state conspiracy." ¹ Never checked, of course, these fragments were assembled, presented



at King's College, London, interviewed 1,200 people and found levels of paranoia in the UK were much higher than previously suspected. "One in three people in the UK regularly suffers paranoid or suspicious fears, clinical psychologists have found" ran the headline. ⁴ Among those quoted was Dr David Harper, a clinical psychologist, who said there was probably something about contemporary Western society which encouraged feelings of paranoia.

Dr Harper was one of the organisers of a 2004 conference of the Paranoia Network, a group similar to the radical psychiatrists of the 1960s, which challenges the

legitimacy of the concept of schizophrenia. ⁵ I was a speaker, doing my usual spiel, namely that the terrible things that we know democratic governments have done in secret in the postwar years make it difficult to be sure where rationality ends and paranoia begins. I cited technology which enabled voices to be broadcast into people's heads inaudible to anyone else. ⁶ Among the participants at the conference were people who 'heard voices' but who were not 'mad'. ⁷

I finished my talk by quoting the late Ralph J Gleason's First Law of American Politics After Watergate – no matter how paranoid you are, what the government is really doing is worse than you could possibly imagine – and added: "Looking at the terrible world we live in, another joke from that period seems apt: I am paranoid, but am I paranoid enough?"

It's a nice line and it got a laugh. But as the Internet information torrent outstrips most people's ability to handle it rationally, it no longer sounds radical, as it once did; just rather glib, and distinctly unfunny.

NOTES

- ¹ This is discussed at ww4report.com/node/775.
- ² <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=2001897549763616199>.
- ³ Google 'fake Osama video'.
- ⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5126208.stm>.
- ⁵ See www.asylumonline.net/.
- ⁶ See <http://www.raven1.net/5159703.htm>, for example.
- ⁷ On 'hearing voices' see <http://society.guardian.co.uk/mentalhealth/page/0,,609154,00.html>.

Governments rarely tell us the truth about anything

on websites, and off we went into the familiar cycle of endless reposting of the same unanalysed material.

Echoing 9/11, a '7/7 Truth Movement' appeared and a minimal-budget documentary called *Mind the Gap* was produced. ² Faced with the videotaped confessions left by the suicide bombers, the conspiracy theorists said the government had faked them, just as the US government had produced a fake Osama Bin Laden video. ³ In June this year, there were over half a million Google hits for "7/7 + conspiracy".

Among the Muslim community, belief in 7/7 conspiracy theories is partly denial. Feeling under pressure anyway, thanks to the activities of Muslim jihadists elsewhere, some British Muslims simply cannot acknowledge that they have produced their own suicide bombers. But there may be a wider dimension to this. A team at the Institute of Psychiatry

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Stage show exposes bizarre tenets of L Ron Hubbard's religion. Or not, as the case may be.



DEVELOPING STORY

**CNN MYSTERY SCIENTOLOGY COMPOUND
SIGNPOST FOR OUTER SPACE?**

SITUATION ROOM



These interlocking circles, etched into the New Mexico desert, were first noticed in 1995. According to a former Scientologist, they mark a landing spot for Scientologists returning from outer space. Michael Pattinson told CNN that they served as a signpost to a compound where the Church of Spiritual Technology – an offshoot of the Church of Scientology – has built a nuclear bomb-proof vault to house Hubbard's works. The Church says the pattern is just a logo. Shown at left is a structure on the site. *Metro*, 17 May 2007.

Oxford-based drama group Collapsible Theatre is booked to stage *Xenu is loose!* – a kitch rock 'n' roll musical about the mythology of the Church of Scientology – at the Edinburgh Festival fringe in August. The play's subtitle is "Cover puny Humans as the Dark Prince of the Galactic Federation rains Atomic Death once more upon your Pitiful Planet – The Musical!". Hubbard's acolytes have urged people to stay away and are considering what action to take against the play, which is due to be staged at Venue C in Chambers Street.

The play is about "Jennifer, a young, beautiful high-school student [who] finds her life transformed when she discovers the purifying

power of L Ron Hubbard's Scientology. But when Xenu, Alien Overlord and timeless nemesis of all that is good, escapes his ancient galactic prison, she and handsome Scientologist Troy must summon every ounce of cunning and resourcefulness to save the world from, like, Total Atomic Destruction." It is partly a pastiche of L Ron's epic novel *Battlefield Earth*, filmed in 2000, starring John Travolta.

Church spokeswoman Janet Kenyon Laveau claimed the play's authors had deliberately mixed the doctrines of Scientology with fiction written by its creator. She urged those curious about L Ron's cosmology to read his books. "There is nothing in the theology or philosophy of Scientology about belief in

aliens," she insisted.

However, Scientologists, having reached Operating Thetan level III, are told that 75 million years ago, the galactic warlord Xenu rounded up 13.5 trillion beings and dumped them on Teegeeack (Earth) before killing them with nuclear bombs. Their tortured souls are now attached to human beings and are at the root of most of the planet's problems.

One website – http://bernie.cncfamily.com/sc/y_xenu.htm – asserts the Xenu story isn't a core belief of Scientology, partly because it came along fairly late in the Church's development, and partly because the majority of Scientologists haven't reached OT III and so don't know about Xenu. That's fair enough; but then, most members of the Church of England might struggle to hold a discussion on the doctrine of atonement or the efficacy of the sacraments.

Besides the official Scientology websites, the interested reader could look at www.xenuisloose.com/; www.xenu.net/archive/ot/; www.disinterestedparty.com/archives/2007/05/mitt_romney_sec.htm; www.disinterestedparty.com/archives/2007/06/lunatics_meet_t.htm; and www.xs4all.nl/~kspaink/fishman/ot3.html. *Scotland on Sunday*, 17 June 2007.

C'est la Guerre...



"Erm... excuse me, could I have my ball back please!"

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THERE IS A GREEN HILL...

The monument of Silbury Hill stands at the heart of the Neolithic landscape comprising the Avebury complex in Wiltshire, England. Silbury stands 130ft (40m) high and dates to c.2,600 BC. It is the tallest artificial prehistoric earthen structure in Europe and is unique in the way it was engineered – stepped tiers of chalk revetment cells in-filled with rubble and then covered in earth. It is a mystery, and there have been exploratory tunnels and shafts dug into it over the centuries, the last being in 1968 when it was assumed that Silbury was the ultimate Bronze Age burial mound and consequently would contain the British equivalent of Tutankhamun's tomb. The BBC's then new colour TV cameras were held at the ready to rush down the tunnel and reveal, live to the world, the wonders within. While it was soon learned that the monument was older than the Bronze Age, no glittering



prize of a tomb was found. But something more remarkable was discovered – grass near the centre base of the structure so miraculously well preserved that it was still green and contained dead flying ants with their filmy wings intact. This showed that the first sods of Silbury Hill were turned in late July or early August, harvest season – the festivals of Lughnassa and Lammas in later traditions.

During heavy rains in 2000, an 18th-century shaft collapsed, causing the centre of the monument to slump like a sad plum pudding. The inadequately filled voids created by some of the other tunnels (including that of 1968) have exacerbated this subsidence, leaving Silbury in real danger of collapse. At last, in May this year, a new, four-month project was commenced, aimed at stabilising the monu-

EARTH MYSTERIES: The subsidence caused at Silbury Hill by rain and the old tunnels has been worsened by the irresponsible activities of "crop circle" zealots who have climbed down into the shaft causing damage and displaying their total ignorance regarding the archaeology of the site. See 'Finger of Blame' at <http://members.fortunecity.com/cropsigns/>.

ment, and in the process taking a last, very careful look around the hill's interior to see if there really was anything secreted within it by its builders. *BBC News*, 11 May 2007.

For the record, your columnist argues that the secrets of Silbury lie outside the monument, and can best be uncovered by looking at its relationship to the surrounding landscape and monuments: it took him 18 years to do it, but some astounding discoveries were made in this way. They were partially recorded in the archaeological literature [*Antiquity*, December 1991] and fully in a book, *Symbiotic Landscapes* [1992] – a special new edition of which, entitled *A Guide to the Open Sec-*

rets of Avebury, will be out later this year.

PLAYING THEIR CARDS RIGHT

Amid the unspeakable anguish of the Iraq invasion disaster, it is easy to forget the "collateral" damage to the archaeological field record of this region [FT214:20], which contains such an important part of our culture's back-story. The matter has concerned scholars, archaeologists and lovers of ancient places in general for some considerable time, and at last the US Department of Defense seems to have listened, for it has come up with a cunning plan. In the way that it gave its troops in Iraq a pack of cards to aid them in identifying the "most wanted" of the Saddam Hussein regime, it has now produced a set of illustrated playing cards for US soldiers in the field in both Iraq and Afghanistan to help them avoid damaging archaeologically important structures. Each suit has a theme: diamonds for artefacts, spades for excavations, hearts for "winning hearts and minds", clubs for heritage preservation. Advisory mottos on the cards range from the blindingly obvious such as "Drive around – not over – archaeological sites" to the more caustic "This site [The Ctesiphon Arch] has survived seventeen centuries. Will it and others survive you?" Maybe a pack of the cards should also be circulated within the White House. *Guardian*, 20 June; *D.Telegraph*, 21 June 2007.

SUBSIDENCE PXL: [HTTP://MEMBERS.FORTUNECITY.COM/CROPSIGNS/SILBURY/SILBURYSEQUENCE.HTML](http://members.fortunecity.com/cropsigns/silbury/silburysequence.html)



CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

89. TREE PARTIES

FT's (208:5) Dendrites sent me scaling the ancient heights, via the Ooralis tribe of Kerala, an area penetrated by Greeks and Romans, some of whom live in trees, either permanently or by night – details at www.indiasite.com/kerala.

Roman arboreal anecdotes tend to feature Tarzan-style high jinks. Pliny (*Natural History*, bk12 ch5 paras9–10) describes a dinner party hosted by Caligula in the branches of a plane tree house fitted out for 15 guests and waiters. He adds sardonically that the emperor, who dubbed this place his 'nest', provided much of the shade through his obesity.

This royal occasion, though, was outdone by Pliny's contemporary, the general-governor-consul Licinius Mucianus, himself the compiler of 32 (lost) volumes of *Mirabilia*, who threw a banquet for 18 guests in a Lycian plane tree, whose hollowed trunk measured 81ft (25m) across, while its branches and leaves were strong enough to act as couches, so comfy that after the party Mucianus slept up there.

Caligula and Mucianus would have been impressed by a tree house in Wisconsin, described in the *Calgary Herald* (19 Aug 1991) as spanning seven maple trees, fully furnished with electricity and telephone.

Attending the bigamous wedding party of Claudius's empress Messalina, Vettius Valens, a well-known doctor and one of her lovers, clambered up a tree for private revelry (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk11 ch30 para6). He shouted down to the other guests that he could see "a terrible storm blowing up from Ostia [Rome's port town]". This turned out to be more prophetic than meteorological: soldiers were coming to liquidate Messalina and her celebrants.

John Moschus (*Spiritual Meadow*, ch70) describes how a hermit dwelling in a plane tree miraculously healed the sword-arm of his would-be barbarian assassin, which had become paralysed in mid-stroke.

Thanks to Tennyson's poem and Buñuel's film, we are familiar with Simeon Stylites, most famous of the early Byzantine pillar-saints who lived on the tops of columns for years on end, a theological flagpole-squattling dubbed by Edward Gibbon as "aerial penance". There was a dendrite variant. St David of Thessalonica (c.AD 450–c.540) dwelt for three years in a nest high in an



almond tree, a residency widely depicted in Byzantine art and hagiography. When back on earth, he impressed Justinian and Theodora, during an imperial audience, by holding hot coals in his hands without damage. Two mediæval Russian saints, Thikon of Kaluga (d.1492) and Paul of Obnora (d.1429), are similarly credited with inhabiting oak trees – various websites comport sources and details.

All very in-tree-guing...

APPENDIX – TO ELK AND BACK

Re: FT's (208:7) elk stories, Julius Caesar (*Gallie Wars*, bk6 ch27) says elks cannot lie down, hence sleep leaning against trees. Aelian (*History of Animals*, bk2 ch16) claims they have hyper-chameleon qualities, changing hair as well as colour. Pliny (bk8 ch15 para39) maintains that the moose likewise snoozes against trees as it has no joint at the hock, adding that its upper lip is so huge that the creature has to walk backwards while grazing to avoid being labially tripped up – most a-moosing – shades of the Goons' immortal ditty "I'm Walking Backwards for Christmas".



ALIEN ZOO

DR KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up of the cryptozoological garden.

A COLOSSAL SURPRISE

In late February 2007, what would appear to be the largest specimen of the enormous but surprisingly little-known colossal squid *Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni* ever recorded was not only seen but also captured. It was caught on a line by a New Zealand fishing boat's crew in Antarctic waters after it attempted to eat a hooked Patagonian toothfish. It took two hours to land, and was estimated to measure 35–39ft (11–12m) long and weigh as much as 990lb (450kg). If confirmed, this would make it 340lb (154kg) heavier than the next biggest colossal squid specimen known, and it would thus be the heaviest squid of any species ever captured! (Giant squids can be longer, but are far less bulky and hence much lighter, than colossal squids.) [AP] 22 Feb; D.Mail, 23 Feb 2007.



GETTY / MINISTRY OF FISHERIES (NZ)

FANFARE FOR A FROGMOUTH

It had been more than a century since a frogmouth – a large-mouthed nightjar-related bird – had been caught anywhere in the Solomon Islands. That lone specimen, now apparently lost, had been classified as a subspecies of the Australian marbled frogmouth *Podargus ocellatus*, after which nothing more on the frogmouth front had been recorded from this island group – until 1998. During a collecting trip that year to the island of Isabel in the Solomons, Florida Museum of Natural History ornithologist Dr Andrew Kratter was alerted by local hunters to the presence there of a frogmouth, and a single specimen was

collected. Once this unique individual was examined and studied, Kratter and fellow Florida ornithologist Dr David Steadman were startled to discover that it was dramatically different from all known species – so much so, in fact, that when finally described in the April 2007 issue of *Ibis*, it required the creation of an entirely new genus to accommodate it. Formally named *Rigidipenna inexpectata* ('unexpected stiff-feathered'), the Solomon Island frogmouth differs markedly from others in several notable ways. Most significant of all is that it is far less adept at flying, due to possessing only eight tail feathers (all other frogmouth species sport 10 or 12), thereby

reducing its lift, and to its much coarser feathers, which diminish its powers of manoeuvrability. It also exhibits distinctive barring on its primary wing feathers and tail feathers, and its plumage boasts larger speckles and more pronounced ventral white spots. Moreover, genetic comparisons fully support this morphological evidence for its taxonomic delineation – thereby making the Solomon Island frogmouth one of the most important ornithological discoveries of the 21st century. <http://news.ufl.edu/2007/04/19/frogmouth-genus> 19 April 2007.

GIANT MYSTERY PIG A MYSTERY NO LONGER

By the time that you read this column, another even more enigmatic, mystifying species will finally have been officially named and described, after tantalising cryptozoologists for several years. Dutch zoologist Dr Marc van Roosmalen has become extremely well known for discovering a sizeable number of new monkey species in Brazil during the past decade. However, during his investigations of these creatures, he has also been gathering information and physical evidence for the existence of several apparently still undescribed species of much larger, even more dramatic mammals. By far the most intriguing of these has been the so-called giant peccary – a very large, seemingly unknown species of porcine ungulate notably bigger than any of the three currently recognised

species. Native to the Brazilian Amazon's Rio Aripuana basin, and living in pairs rather than in herds, the giant peccary is said to resemble the collared peccary *Pecari tajacu* superficially, but is decidedly larger though less robust, with much longer legs, yet a proportionately smaller head. It is only thinly bristled-haired, with brown and white fur rather than dark blackish-grey.

First encountered by him in 2000, various physical remains of this species, including its holotype (type specimen), were subsequently obtained by Roosmalen from local hunters, and in 2003 he was able not only to see but also to film three specimens. One complete mitochondrial D-loop and two nuclear SINE PRE-1 DNA sequences from giant peccary material compared with that of the collared peccary support full-species status, with an estimated divergence time of 1–1.2 million years BP. Accordingly, in their *Bonner Zoologischen Beiträge* paper published in June 2007, Roosmalen and his four co-authors formally dubbed the giant peccary *Pecari maximus*, which now takes over from the previous record-holder, the Chacoan peccary *Catagonus wagneri* (unexpectedly discovered alive in 1974 after having been previously known to science only as a long-extinct Ice Age fossil species), as the world's largest living species of peccary. *Bonner Zoologischen Beiträge*, June 2007; M. van Roosmalen, several pers. comms, May 2007.



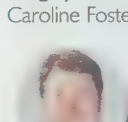
MARC VAN ROOSMALEN

Why Not Be A Writer?

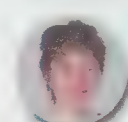
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ABCD

ALIEN BIG CAT DIARY

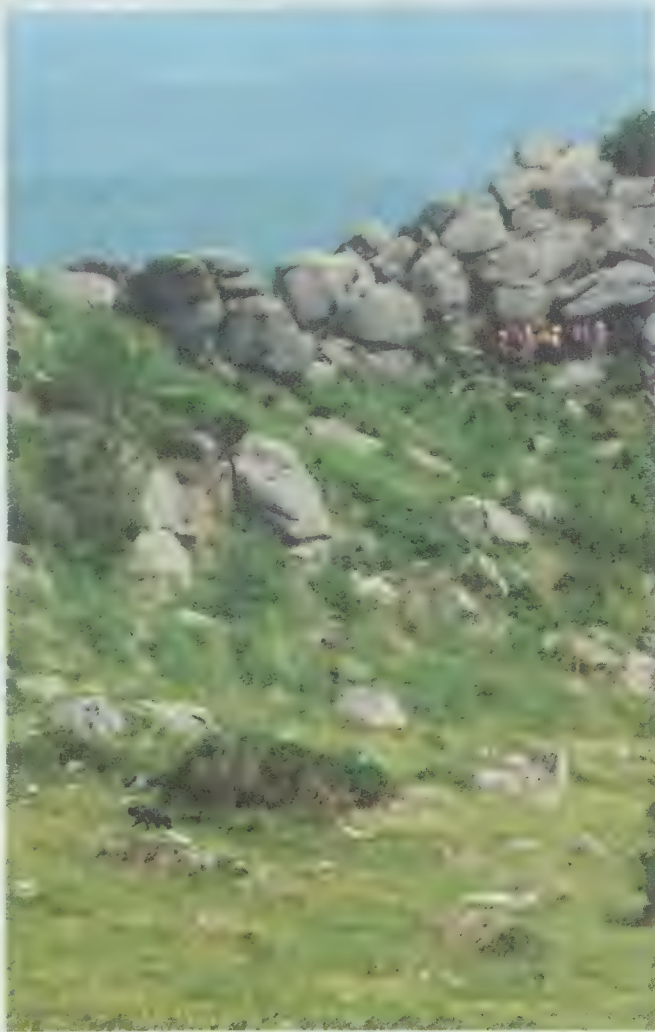
MERRILY HARPUR of the Dorset Big Cat Register and Big Cats in Britain presents her bimonthly column of all the Alien Big Cat sightings fit to print with a round-up of activity during May and June 2007.

MAY - JUNE 2007

"Charlotte Church savaged to death in the Beck-hams' back garden" was the arresting headline in the *Daily Mail* of 3 June 2007. She was the lamb named after the singer and belonging to celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, who was fattening her on the grass of David and Victoria's Hertfordshire estate with the intention of eating her. Unfortunately, a big cat beat him to it, leaving just her face and its probably reproachful expression. This at least was the opinion of a local vet who no doubt inferred the culprit from a recent spate of ABC reports in the county – culminating in the sighting by two police officers of a "large, black feline-type animal" on the prowl in Hertford. This sparked a hunt by 21 armed officers and a zookeeper with a blowpipe loaded with tranquiliser darts – but the creature was never found.

But Hertfordshire was not alone; cat-flaps broke out elsewhere during May and June. The Diss area of Norfolk produced reports of black panther-like animals in Thelveton, Burston, The Heywood, Gissing, Fersfield and Bressingham (*Diss Express*, 16 May), while in Clackheaton, West Yorkshire, Debbie Ross and her family reported one of many ABC sightings in the area mainly centring on railway tracks (*The Press*, 19 June). Among many Scottish sightings, there were several on the Isle of Mull. An hour by ferry from the mainland, the island has a long history of ABC sightings, which seems to demolish conclusively the theory that they descend from released pets. (Big Cats In Britain – BCIB)

Away from media attention, other black, panther-like ABCs emerged stealthily up and down the country to shock the unsuspecting, before disappearing into hedges. One witness was fishing for brown trout on the river Kelvin in Kirkintilloch, Scotland: "It was getting dusky when we saw an animal, approximately 3ft [90cm] in length and about 2ft [60cm] tall, moving along the top of a wall in a builders' yard.



It sparked a hunt by armed officers and a zookeeper

It was definitely a big cat... I have a large male Maine coon and the thing we saw was at least three times the size of him..." (BCIB, 17 June)

In Northamptonshire, a driver travelling towards Oundle also glimpsed a typically impressive black ABC: "The first thing I noticed was the colour, thinking 'what animal is so black?' Then I noticed the tail – very long and

LEFT: The creature photographed by falconer Martin Whitley on Dartmoor; it paid no attention to the climbers on the Tor visible at the top right.

curled up at the end. It dawned on me that what I was seeing was a big cat. It was 4ft [1.2m] long or more, with pointed ears. As it ran, the muscles at the top of its legs looked so powerful, yet it seemed to glide across the road, and its coat shone in the headlights..." (BCIB, 14 May).

"I am very sceptical about these things" admitted Graham Smyth from Goosnargh in Lancashire, "so I couldn't quite believe what we saw." He and his wife were checking cows when across the stream they saw "unmistakably a big cat" walking across the field. "It was two or three feet [60–90cm] high and about six or seven feet [1.8–2.1m] long including its thick, curved tail. It walked very slowly with a very smooth action." Unusually for an ABC witness, he managed to get his camera out in time. "I tried to get a picture but panicked a bit and used the wrong setting. The cat disappeared into the hedge-row." (BCIB, 20 May)

Even Brenda Butler, well-known in UFO circles, reportedly had a sighting in Rendlesham Forest in Suffolk while conducting a tour there – not of a UFO this time



FACING PAGE, ABOVE, BELOW: A sequence of blown-up shots of the Dartmoor mystery beast, which seems to change in appearance from one frame to the next.

but of an ABC sitting UFO-style in the middle of a forest clearing. (BCIB, 9 May)

Although creatures resembling melanistic leopards (popularly named black panthers) predominated among the 100 or so reports logged in May and June, the odd puma-coloured big cat also reared its head. Appropriately, one even appeared in the old stamping ground of the 'Surrey puma' of the 1960s, and in one of modern ABCs' most favoured locations, a golf course, where a sportsman in search of his lost ball found instead the corpse of a freshly killed fox cub. "Hearing a movement in the bushes nearby," he reported, "I went closer to look, and stopped in shock as I saw the face of a big cat crouching in a bush, looking right at me! Then it turned and went into the undergrowth. It was brown milk-chocolate colour, even slightly ginger, and it had smallish eyes and small round ears. I am 100 per cent sure that it was a big cat." (BCIB, 29 April)

Other strangely marked felines appeared in May and June, including a rash of odd, lynx-like creatures. One appeared to a cyclist near St Mary's Church, Bexley village in Kent: "At first I mistook it for a dog, and slowed almost to a standstill waiting for the owner to emerge. I then noticed the animal had pointed, tufted ears, and the muzzle was short and rounded, with clearly visible whiskers; its tail was only a foot or so [90cm] in length but the paws were larger than normal." He was getting out his mobile phone to take a photo when it rang, and the lynx made off into the adjoining cemetery. (BCIB)

There was also a number of lynx-type cats on the prowl in Somerset – one was spotted



by two lorry drivers, making its way through scrub adjoining Yeo Valley Foods at Highbridge in Somerset on 2 May. Two days later and 20 miles (32km) east, a cyclist approached a similar animal at a road-kill; it looked at him and calmly "sloped off" into a thicket. And a month later, Alan Weightman, driving near Midsomer Norton, was startled by a lynx the size of a large dog, crossing the road in front of him. (BCIB, 2+4 May, 4 June)

Nor were lynx-type sightings confined to the south-west. A Lincolnshire man out walking his dog saw what he at first assumed was a muntjac deer before realising it was a big cat, "well-muscled with stocky, powerful limbs". It was "a predominantly sandy colour, and the tail was short but longer than that of a muntjac, wider and more furry, with a distinctive white tip". Standard lynx actually have distinctive black tips to their tails. Perhaps the location had something to do with the animal's odd appearance for this 'lynx' had appeared at a traditional haunt of shape-shifting beings – Hob-Hole bank, at Fishtoft near Boston.

Easily the most intriguing of

Martin is adamant that the creature was not a dog

June's collection of reports was the enigmatic ABC seen by Martin Whitley, a professional falconer, Devon born and bred. On 9 June, he contacted the national research network *Big Cats In Britain* to relate the following experience:

"I was flying a hawk on Dartmoor with some American clients, when one of them pointed out this creature. It was walking along a path about 200 yards [180m] away from us. It was black and grey and comparable in size to a miniature pony. It had very thick shoulders, a long, thick tail with a blunt end, and small round ears. Its movement appeared feline; then 'bear-like' sprang to mind. There was a party climbing on the tor opposite, making a racket, but this it ignored completely."

Martin's American clients took a series of photos. They

show the Dartmoor landscape, the school party on the tor, and in the middle distance an animal which seems to change shape in each frame, from cat, to bear, to pony, to boar, to various breeds of dog. Indeed, members of the BCIB group invoked nearly the whole of Crufts in attempting to give the creature a 'rational' explanation, while the proximity of Hound Tor suggested to some a possible kinship to Devon's spectral Wisht Hounds.

Martin, however, is adamant that the animal was not a dog: "I have worked with dogs all my life and it was definitely not canine. I have also seen a collie-sized black cat in the area, about 10 years ago, and it was not that – this was a lot bigger."

While he does not claim to know what the creature was, his impression throughout was that it was more feline than anything else, a verdict confirmed by the experiences of his neighbours. "I am about as local as it gets and liaise very closely with all the landowners in the area and have discussed my sighting with several of them. You would be surprised at the number of people who have seen black big cats (and something resembling a small bear) in the area, over the course of the years. Of course, being Dartmoor farmers they would only mention it when someone else says they have seen one..." (BCIB)

In cryptozoological circles, the 'grail quest' is for good photos or film of mystery animals: only these, it is generally thought, will provide reliable 'proof'. How gratifyingly paradoxical it is, then, that when such photos do turn up, far from clarifying the mystery they apparently compound it more deeply, frame by frame.

FORTEAN FOLLOWUPS

Further developments in stories featured in previous issues of FT



CP PHOTO / ANDREW VAUGHAN

NOWHERE MAN [FT150:23, 159:27]

"Mr Nobody", the man who walked into a Toronto hospital in 1999 with a broken nose and claiming total amnesia, has finally been identified as a Romanian fraudster. His hospital bracelet said his name was Philip Staufen, born 7 June 1975. It was presumed he had muttered this to hospital authorities while he was semi-conscious. A linguist declared that his accent was English public school with a slight northern brogue, but there was no record of a "Philip Staufen" in France, Germany, Britain or any Anglophone country. Sean Spence, editor of *Vulcan* magazine, then thought he resembled "Georges Lechit", a male model from Bordeaux, who had appeared in gay pornographic films and magazines in the UK.

Faced with evidence gathered by journalists, Mr Nobody has now admitted he was born Ciprian Skeid in Timisoara, Romania, 36 years ago. While working as a cook in Germany, he was asked to send money home. He flew into a rage and his family never heard from him again. His mother went into a decline and died in 2000. He moved to Paris on a temporary visa, where a male friend supported him – he said work was against his principles. Told to find a job, he moved to London on a stolen French passport in the name of George Lecuit (not "Georges Lechit" as reported in 2002). He worked as a masseur at a gay bathhouse.

How he arrived in Toronto is a mystery. His lawyer there, Manuel Azevedo, stopped acting for him, suspecting he was faking amnesia, but Azevedo's daughter had fallen in love with him. He married her and moved to Portugal. Confronted by *GQ* magazine and shown a copy of his real birth certificate, Skeid insisted he had suffered a "very real breakdown" and does not recall how he came to be in Canada. Claiming his father, who died in 2002, was a violent drunk, he said: "My mother didn't have the courage to leave the crazy man who ruined her life. I'd rather be a fake nobody than the real me. My life could justify acts much worse than those attributed to me. At first I tried not to be anyone at all. Then I tried to become someone. And then someone better." *Mail on Sunday*, 20 May 2007.

The Piano Man, the alleged amnesiac who turned up in Kent in April 2005 and spent four months there in hospital before being identified as Bavarian farmer's son Andreas Grassl [FT199:4, 202:19], is now a student in Basel. His friend Markus Groebel has revealed that he suffered a breakdown in 2005 when a gay love affair collapsed. "He cracked up. That's it," he said. *News Of The World*, 29 Apr 2007.

WAITING FOR THE POE TOASTER [FT206:18]



For the 58th year, a mysterious visitor left a half-empty bottle of Martel cognac and three red

roses at Edgar Allan Poe's grave in Baltimore on the poet's birthday, 19 January. The roses are thought to honour Poe, his mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, and his wife Virginia, all of whom are buried in the cemetery. Jeff Jerome, curator of the Poe House and Museum, said 55 people braved a chilly morning to glimpse the annual ritual of the so-called "Poe toaster". Once it realised who he was, the crowd rushed to one of the cemetery's entrances to get a glimpse, but the toaster slipped out another way. Jerome has seen the toaster every 19 January since 1976. Starting in 1949, the centenary of Poe's death, a frail figure made the visit to his grave. In 1993, the original visitor left a cryptic note saying "The torch will be passed". A later note said the man, who apparently died in 1998, had handed the tradition on to his sons. Poe was born in Boston and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He died at the age of 40 on 7 October 1849 after collapsing in a Baltimore tavern. [AP] *Boston Globe*, 19 Jan 2007.



Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

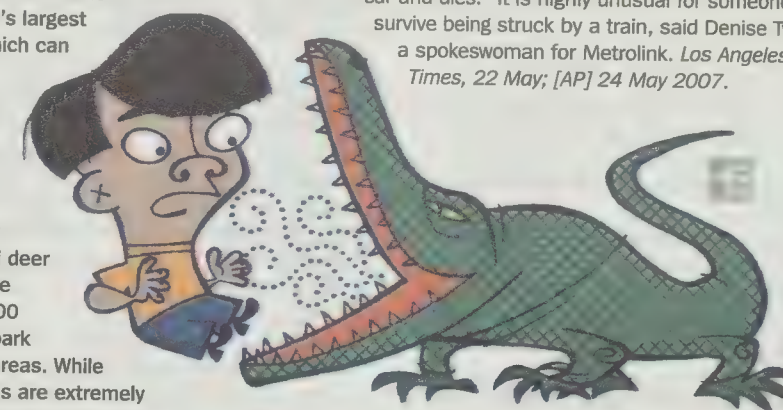
MANSUR, AN EIGHT- (OR NINE-) YEAR-OLD BOY, WAS mauled to death by a Komodo dragon in eastern Indonesia on 2 June. He was with his uncle mending fishing nets (or relieving himself in a bush) on Komodo Island – one of the largest in the Komodo national park – when the dragon attacked him. It clawed his right leg, bit him in the stomach with its serrated teeth and shook him in an attempt to break his neck. His uncle and other men pelted the creature with rocks until it released the boy, who was unconscious and bleeding heavily. Before a boat could be arranged to take him to a doctor, he had died of his injuries. Even if he had survived the initial attack, say experts, he would have been killed by blood poisoning from the bacteria in the dragon's saliva.

The park, and the western and northern coastlines of neighbouring island of Flores, are the natural habitat of the dragon, the world's largest monitor lizard, which can grow up to 10ft (3m) and weigh as much as 300lb (136kg). It can sprint at 15mph (24km/h) and its usual prey are monkeys, wild deer and rats. There are an estimated 3,000 remaining in the park and surrounding areas. While attacks on humans are extremely rare, a local story persists of a Swiss tourist who vanished while on an expedition to photograph the creatures in the wild a decade ago. His binoculars and torn clothing were found in the jungle.

In 1974, an elderly European tourist, Baron Rudolf von Reding Biberegg, fell and injured his knee on a hiking trip on Komodo Island. His guide returned to a village to seek help. All the search party found was the man's hat, camera and a bloodstained shoe. In 2001, the husband of film star Sharon Stone was bitten on the foot by a Komodo in Los Angeles Zoo. Phil Bronstein, 50, needed surgery to reattach tendons and rebuild his big toe, plus a massive dose of antibiotics to avert septicæmia. [AFP] 4 June; *D.M.*, 5 June 2007.

BRANDON JULIUS FUNCHES, 20, WAS SEEN arguing with his girlfriend while driving in the San Fernando

Valley neighbourhood of Sunland in California on 21 May. He then pulled his Dodge Magnum into the opposite lane of traffic, drove in front of two other vehicles waiting at a level crossing and stopped on the tracks. Only seconds away, a 450-ton Metrolink passenger train sped toward them. According to police spokesman Mike Lopez, Funches leapt out of the car and left his girlfriend behind, while others maintained Funches was actually ejected from the vehicle when the train struck. However, one thing is certain: upon impact, the car was launched forward, hurling metal debris that struck Funches dead. Though the vehicle was damaged so badly that officials couldn't accurately determine its make and model, the girlfriend was carried from the scene alive, with serious injuries but in otherwise stable condition. "She gets hit by a train and lives," said Lopez. "He gets hit by his own car and dies." It is highly unusual for someone to survive being struck by a train, said Denise Tyrrell, a spokeswoman for Metrolink. *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May; [AP] 24 May 2007.



TERRY COLON

SUDAN'S GOAT WIFE DIES [FT212:12]



Rose, the goat forced into marrying Charles Tombe after he was found humping the animal in the Hai-Malakal suburb of Juba in southern Sudan, died in April after swallowing a plastic bag as she scavenged for food scraps on streets of Juba.

In February 2006, Tombe was hauled before a council of elders by the goat's owner, Mr Alifi. Tombe told them he was drunk at the time he took a fancy to Rose and was ordered to pay Alifi a dowry of 15,000 Sudanese dinars (£37), as he was considered to have used the goat "as his wife". (In southern Sudan, if a man is caught having sex with a girl he is expected to marry her immediately in order to save her honour and that of her family.) That was

the basis of Tombe's punishment. After the hearing, Alifi said: "We have given him the goat, and as far as we know they are still together." The original report in the *Juba Post* in February 2006 was picked up by the BBC monitoring service and became one of the most popular news stories on the Internet – more than a year later, it was still getting 100,000 hits a day.

Tom Rhodes, a Briton who helped found the *Juba Post* in 2004, is astonished by the reaction to his initial report. He was concerned that readers would accuse him of making fun of Sudan, but he needn't have worried. Although strangers occasionally accost him in the street – as one of the few white people in Juba he is hardly inconspicuous – it is only to congratulate him on the story. "It shows the Sudanese have a sense of humour".

Rose left a male kid – goat, not human – and a grieving widower.

It is not known whether she was cremated or turned into curry. *Guardian* G2, 24 April; *BBC News*, 3 May; *Times*, 4 May 2007.

FATHER N O'BODY [FT212:26]

The bronze plaque commemorating Father Pat Noise who died under "suspicious circumstances" when his carriage plunged into the River Liffey on 10 August 1919, was affixed to O'Connell Bridge in Dublin in April 2004 in an indent left when part of the ill-fated "Millennium Countdown" clock was removed; but it was two years before the *Sunday Tribune*, a Dublin newspaper, exposed it as a hoax. The work was allegedly carried out by two brothers as a tribute to their father (the non-existent "Father Pat Noise" is a play on pater noster, the Latin for "our father"). A "friend of the artist" emailed *The Irish Times* last year to say that the interest in the plaque "reflects our famous sense of humour, and

that unquantifiable Irish quality that sees us fight for the underdog every time, something that others never understand". Following the publicity, people began leaving flowers, candles and "RIP" messages on the bridge.

Last December, the south-east area committee of Dublin City Council voted in favour of a motion tabled by Cllr Dermot Lacey to leave the plaque in place as it generated interest both at home and abroad – but it was nevertheless removed in March 2007. Someone then replaced it on an unknown date and the replacement was due to be removed on 22 May. This action was then aborted; Cllr Lacey said it appeared the relevant city council officials were unaware of the councillors' decision. "This is a rare case of a prank pulled on officialdom and I think it should be left there," he said. "It's a monument to eccentricity and it adds a bit of colour to our lives." *Irish Times*, 22+24 May 2007.

A WINDOW CLEANER DROWNED IN HIS OWN bucket after collapsing from a heart condition. Mark Fairhurst, 35, of Wigan, Greater Manchester, was working at the home of Elizabeth Bebe in Whalley, near Wigan, in June 2006. She told Bolton Coroner's Court: "I came home that evening and went outside to hang some washing at the back when I saw a ladder propped up against the wall. I then saw Mark lying on the ground motionless, with his arms tucked in and his head tilted to the right inside the bucket. It looked like he had been in that position for some time." She thought he had fallen while on the ground, rather than from his ladder. Mr Fairhurst had complained about heart palpitations earlier in the year but had not seen a doctor. Verdict: accidental death. *BBC News*, 17 May; *Sun*, 18 May 2007.



the UFO files

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UFOCAL POINTS

JENNY RANDL is a UFO researcher and author of the book *UFOs: The World's Most Mysterious Phenomena*.

UFO sightings are curious things. Sometimes, the most innocuous-sounding report will escalate into a story that runs and runs, whereas an event that starts off with impressive credentials gradually crumbles about one's ears.

On 9 January, for example, in Van Buren, Arkansas, the sort of incident occurred that got local media very excited, principally because the witness was a retired US Air Force Colonel with decades of experience piloting jets such as F-16s. At 7pm that evening, Colonel Fields saw two intense white lights low on the southern horizon. Over the course of several minutes, these disappeared and were replaced by up to four or five others, which in turn faded away. They were all yellow, white or orange in colour. The witness considered various options, rejecting aircraft, and speculated that they were 'some kind of energy'.

Over the next few days, more reports flooded in from locals who had seen the UFOs, and photographs taken by the Colonel were analysed at a South Carolina research lab. Here, the greatly enlarged blobs of light revealed to stunned observers what they described as a 'scary face' and a 'being behind a flight console', greatly escalating the apparent significance of the events.

However, to anyone familiar with UFO investigation, this case looked doomed from the start. Despite impressive aspects, there were warning signs: it is notoriously easy to over-enlarge fuzzy blob-like UFOs and see structure in the resulting blow-ups.

The Arkansas case has many similarities to a film depicting identical blobs of light captured from a campsite near Stonehenge in the 1970s. That one led to national news coverage at the time, but research quickly revealed the unlikely culprits – hinted at by the presence of a military training site nearby.

So, too, in this 2007 case, where the coloured 'energy' balls seem to have been connected with an exercise involving A-10 tankbuster aircraft well to the south dropping parachute flares that drifted very slowly sideways before fading out in the distance. That said, not all the witnesses were persuaded by this explanation.

South America continues to provide a steady stream of interesting reports, with more attention focused on volcanic regions. One sighting took place on 28 January from the flight deck of a commercial Boeing 737 that had just departed from Mexico City and was heading for Puerto Vallante. Climbing through 10,000ft (3,000m),



A glowing ball of fire was seen to crash into a hill

flight engineer Enrique Piedras was using his mobile phone to film the ascent over the snow-capped volcanoes when the captain yelled "What's that?", pointing to a small metallic sphere several hundred feet away. This rapidly moved away from the jet, but not before briefly triggering the collision alarm on the aircraft. This event was recorded by the engineer's mobile phone images.

Early spring in Britain brought both mild weather and a welcome return of UFO sightings, including a case on 26 February near Boulby, Lincolnshire. Here, a floating mass of lights, at least eight in number and mostly reddish in hue, was seen to drift behind some low bushes before fading away suddenly into the background.

On 2 March at 10.40am, something rather odd appeared over the High Road in Tottenham, London. Watching from an upper window, a woman spotted a scarlet oval that looked like tinfoil and that was heading towards the Tottenham Hotspur football ground. Suspicion here might fall on the possibility of a balloon, although the witness was unconvinced of this.

However, possibly the scariest British case was reported by several people in Hertford at around 4.00pm on 12 March. An especially graphic episode took place in the Sele Farm area, where a family in their garden enjoying the weather had quite a shock. The young son was lying on a trampoline when he screamed at the sight of a large, black, metallic cylinder falling

from the sky overhead – he was momentarily convinced that the town was about to be obliterated, before the thing stopped and began to climb back up into cloud where it disappeared. Was this a stray dirigible or one of the home-made remote-controlled UFOs that are rumoured to have been constructed and set loose around this part of Hertfordshire?

Finally, not one but two crashed UFO reports, although with results every bit as unsatisfactory as Roswell six decades before.

On 17 January, a glowing ball of fire was seen to crash into a hill near Chicoana, Argentina. The sheriff's office was forced to respond after receiving

a number of eyewitness reports, and the fear grew that it might be an air crash, particularly as some said that the object had detonated with a great explosion. Next day, a six-hour search and rescue mission scoured the remote area without finding anything, and aviation sources made it clear that no aircraft were reported missing or should have been overflying the area at the time of the impact. Next day, a team of specialists with backpacks went into the mountains looking for wreckage but found nothing, and the investigation was closed. Theories as to the cause included speculation by the police that the apparent explosion was sunlight reflecting off rocks on the mountainside. A UFO researcher noted that drug trafficking aircraft were known to operate surreptitiously in these mountains.

Even more extraordinary is the case reported by Somalianet. On 21 March, an object supposedly fell from the sky in a remote jungle region north of Buulo Burde. Despite the remarkable evidence suggested in the story, it later transpired that it was based on one witness's account and the news agency was forced to apologise and admit that it could not verify the tale.

For what it's worth, the witness claimed that the object had passed overhead that evening before impacting into the bush with a loud bang. It was later discovered intact in a large impact zone. The mysterious object supposedly glowed in daylight and was illuminated by lights at night, while emitting sounds in an unidentified foreign language. Several weeks later, visitors to the area found numerous villagers convinced that the object was out there somewhere, but nobody knew where it was or admitted to having seen it.

Let us hope that 60 years from now we won't still be arguing about this one!

Thanks to: *Journal of Hispanic UFOs*, *Planeta UFO*, *Ufologyinuk*, *Joe Kovacs*, *Worldnet daily*, *Somalianet*, *Naragansett Times*, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, *Whitby Today*, *Moline Dispatch*.

FLYING SAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE present their regular column on UFO sightings and claims from the world's UFO community.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S GATE?

Cast your minds back to 26 March 1996. On that date, 39 UFO believers in the USA committed ritual suicide in the mistaken belief that their souls could hitch a ride with Comet Hale-Bopp (FT99:32; 100:35-40). In the following year, several other cult members also joined the great UFO in the sky. The deceased belonged to Heaven's Gate, a cult founded by Do and Ti, who had both been saucer fanatics during the 1970s, when they were known as Bo and Peep. You would think that the mind manipulation and subsequent deaths of over 50 people would be enough to deter all but the certifiable from becoming attached to the cult. You would be wrong. After lying low for 10 years, Heaven's Gate is open again. One member, Weslody, issued a press release in June clearly stating that the cult was active, and is seen speaking about it in an online video. Heaven's Gate, we are told, is not a religion – it's an "experience and a duty and a privilege". Yet read between the lines and you'll see that the "new" Heaven's Gate appears to be a split from the original Heaven's Gate, and, in true Monty Python style, one subsection of the cult is now busily dissing the other. The "new" Heaven's Gate appears to have hitched its belief system to Comet McNaught, visible earlier in the year, brightening and becoming quite spectacular once it crossed into the Southern Hemisphere. It remains to be seen whether its disciples decide to check out from planet Earth in the same manner as their predecessors. <http://webspawn.com/users/heavensgatetng2/>; <http://tinyurl.com/2f7w9h>.

CHANNEL ISLANDS UFO REMAINS A PUZZLER

Seasoned pilots frequently see UFOs, yet are reluctant to report their experiences for fear of the publicity that inevitably follows. Pressure from both the commercial airlines and the UFO 'industry' often means few pilots are prepared to make official reports of such events to the authorities. But in April, one courageous pilot, Ray Bowyer (above), broke the taboo by speaking publicly about two UFOs he saw over the Channel Islands while on a regular flight from Southampton to Alderney. His sighting is possibly the most important UFO event in recent years because his testimony is supported not only by a number of passengers, but also by the pilot of a second aircraft and, possibly, by radar evidence.

On 23 April, Bowyer – who has over 20 years' flying experience – was at the controls of a BN2a Trislander approaching Alderney when



he spotted a "brilliant sparkling object" hovering in the clear afternoon sky. At this stage, the Trislander was at an altitude of around 4,000ft (1,200m) and the UFO appeared to be 10-15 miles (16-24km) away. Initially, he believed the light was a reflection from greenhouses on the island of Guernsey, but as he got closer the object became larger and a second, which appeared identical in shape and size, became visible. The first sighting seemed at first to be at the same altitude as the plane, but later both objects seemed to descend towards haze and cloud above the islands, which could be seen below. Bowyer then realised the object he first saw appeared to be much larger and farther away than he had first assumed. At least five of his passengers could also see the phenomena, which were visible for around 12 minutes, and the pilot was able to study them in detail for around 10 minutes through binoculars. He said the UFOs seemed elongated, with sharply defined edges and a "dark graphite grey patch" about a third of the way along their length. All the while, he was talking to Air Traffic Controllers at Jersey, who initially said they could see nothing on radar. But, after a number of requests, the controllers confirmed they had "a primary contact" in the area described by the pilot. At the same time, the pilot of a Jetstream aircraft en route to Jersey was asked if he could see anything. As he passed the island of Sark, he reported seeing a cigar-shaped object "yellow-beige in colour" behind his aircraft, in a similar position to that described by Bowyer. As the Trislander began its landing approach, the pilot lost sight of the UFOs in the haze.

Bowyer filed a report with the Civil Aviation Authority and the story quickly leaked to the press. The Ministry of Defence decided that, because the sighting occurred in French air space, there was no threat to the UK and there-

fore no official investigation was required. They also poured cold water on the radar sighting on the basis that Jersey's radar was "secondary only and therefore unable to achieve a primary radar contact", in stark contradiction to the controller's story. As an exercise in buck-passing this took some beating, as yet again the MOD had decided to cut and run rather than investigate a UFO incident in any detail. Despite the lack of interest displayed by the authorities, a small group of ufologists both in the UK and France have begun a detailed investigation of the incident and the results will be published here in FT in due course.

In the meantime, speculation about the cause of the sighting has continued. In June, *The Sun* published an imaginative artist's impression of the UFOs, claiming the pilot had estimated each was "up to a mile wide". In fact, this was an inaccurate estimate based upon the pilot's notion that the objects were farther away than he initially thought. A writer in the local *Alderney Journal* suggested the lights might have been sundogs, created by reflections from ice crystals in the atmosphere. But this explanation was dismissed by Bowyer who said he had seen these before and they did not resemble the position and appearance of the UFOs. Some experts have speculatively linked the sighting to the earthquake which struck the south Kent coast five days afterwards (see FT224:2). Meanwhile, the MOD released its file on the pilot's sightings via their FOI website, along with a further section of their UFO database, which contains brief details of sightings reported to them between 1999 and 2001. www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FreedomOfInformation/; BBC News Online, 25 Apr; Guernsey Press & Star, 26+28 Apr; The Independent, 4 May; Sun, 22 Jun; Alderney Journal, 23 Jun 2007.

BRITAIN'S X-FILES

10. DI 55: The real Men in Black

The public opening of the MOD UFO archive (see FT223:4) has turned the spotlight firmly onto the secretive world of intelligence interest in UFOs. DAVID CLARKE reveals that from the 1960s onwards Britain's real 'Men In Black' were hot on the trail of crashed spaceships from an alien nation.



UNCLASSIFIED

LEFT: The logo on a DI 55 document.

During 1966-67, Britain experienced one of its most intense UFO waves and the MOD received almost 400 sighting reports from a variety of sources. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and demands were made that the MOD set up its own equivalent of the American 'Project Blue Book'. This did not happen, but behind closed doors responsibility for handling UFOs was quietly passed to an intelligence branch: DI 55. They would – after 30 years of investigations – produce the controversial Condign report (see FT211:4-6).

Their work, like that of all intelligence branches, is highly classified, and until recently the MOD would not even acknowledge their existence. But, since the early 1990s, the ongoing release of intelligence material both at the National Archives and, since 2005, via the Freedom of Information Act, has made blanket secrecy pointless. This is reflected in a memo from DI 55 to the MOD's UFO desk in July 1995 in which a senior officer says he sees "no reason for continuing to deny that [his branch] has an interest in UFOs", and adds that "it should, perhaps, be seen as a step towards a more open disclosure of the MOD's interest".¹

'Fifty-five', as it is known to its staff, is in fact just one of a large group of covert DI branches whose responsibilities range from nuclear weapons to chemical warfare and electronic eavesdropping. We know they work closely with the UK's security services – MI5, MI6 and GCHQ – to collect and assess evidence of potential threats to the UK.² As a branch of the MOD's Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS), DI 55's primary role is to collect information on foreign weapons systems, specifically guided missiles, spacecraft and satellites. From 1967, UFOs were added to that list.

Publicly, the MOD has always claimed the 'UFO desk' – known as S4 (Air) until 1978 – dealt with all UFO matters and only drew advice from other branches when necessary. But internal documents prove that from 1967 incidents "where no immediate satisfactory explanation can be determined – i.e. they are truly UFOs" were passed to the DIS for action. From that point, S4 were deemed to have no further "need to know" and the civil servants on the 'UFO desk' had no motivation or authorisation to inquire any further.

During the 1950s, the old Air Ministry's intelligence branch DDI (Tech) had carried out field investigations

of UFO reports made by 'credible witnesses' such as police officers and pilots. Following the creation of the new MOD in 1964, this duty was passed to the DIS. In January 1966, Cheshire policeman Colin Perks reported seeing a glowing green object the size of a bus hovering behind a row of houses in Wilmslow while on an early morning patrol. Within a couple of weeks, an intelligence officer turned up at Perks's station to quiz him. In his report, the officer says: "[T]here is no reason to doubt the fact that this constable saw something completely foreign to his previous experience."³ When, in October the following year – at the height of the UFO wave – two police officers reported chasing a star-spangled "flying cross" at speeds of up to 90 mph (145km/h) across the darkened Devon countryside, the spooks swung into action again. Scientist John Dickison was sent from London to quiz the two PCs. Dickison worked for the space weapons section of DI 55 and was an expert on guided missiles and satellites.

These two cases were just the first of a series of field investigations of British UFO encounters led by the intelligence services. When the MOD reviewed their UFO policy in 1967, the DIS reported that the vast majority of sightings they had received could be explained as "satellites, space debris, rocket launches or manifestations of meteorological or other natural phenomena". No sighting, they briefed, had ever been established "as a real or potential threat to UK airspace and no intelligence of any value has ever been gleaned from UFO reports".⁴

Nevertheless, the MOD recommended that DI 55 should keep "a watching brief" on UFOs due to their expertise in scientific aspects of space. During the Cold War, the West's intelligence services were keen to snap up any hard evidence which might provide clues to advances in Soviet space technology. One way of achieving this was to monitor UFO reports in foreign countries for clues about where and when Russian space junk was likely to crash down on Earth's surface. In the 1950s, the US Air Defence Command set up a crack intelligence team based at Fort Belvoir in Virginia under the codename Project Moon Dust. Their role was to act as a 'quick reaction' force to collect downed Soviet space debris. They also had responsibility for the investigation of "reliably reported UFOs within the United States".⁵

Moon Dust shared their intelligence on "cosmic crashes" with British opposite numbers at DI 55. One example was the report of a UFO falling into the Himalayan mountains on 25 March 1968. Four mysterious pieces of metal were recovered by the Nepalese, who alerted both the US and UK embassies in Kathmandu. A secret report on the crash produced by DI 55 – and circulated to the US intelligence agencies

– revealed that of the two major pieces found, one was spirited out of Nepal for "examination and analysis in the UK". The report reveals they first suspected the main object – a large rocket-shaped nozzle – was part of a new guided missile developed by China or the Soviet Union. But detailed analysis discovered it was actually part of the Cosmos 208 satellite launched on 21 March, four days before the UFO crash. The Soviets had not officially announced its launch because its mission was to spy on the West.⁶

The interest which DI 55 displayed in this and other supposed cosmic crashes reveals the true nature of their interest in UFOs, which continues to this day. As one of their reports points out, UFO sightings should be handled carefully because amongst the "noise" there was "always the chance of observing foreign aircraft of revolutionary design". Or, indeed, the opportunity to bag a piece of spacecraft from an alien nation – such as Soviet Russia!

Of more immediate concern was the very real risk to the civilian population posed by the re-entry of space debris over the UK. When the nuclear-powered Soviet reconnaissance satellite Cosmos 954 disintegrated over the Northwest Territory of Canada in January 1978, radioactive debris was scattered over 124,000 sq km (47,900 sq miles). Fears of what could happen if a similar piece of junk should fall from the sky over Britain were raised the following year when the giant US space station Skylab began to decay from its orbit. Although not powered by a nuclear reactor, it weighed some 75 metric tonnes and there were fears that Britain might be struck by fragments.

In March 1979, the head of Defence Intelligence asked the Home Office to circulate guidelines to all civil and military police forces in the UK. The restricted document, entitled "Satellite Accidents", spelled out the emergency procedures that should be put in place in the event of a nuclear hazard reaching the UK from space. While radiation was not a risk with Skylab, there remained the possibility of injury or damage from falling debris, although this was deemed to be "extremely remote".

Mystery of 'bright pulsating light' that left 90 m.p.h. police standing



ROGER WILLEY (LEFT) AND CLIFFORD WAYCOTT

Z-Car chases 'flying cross'



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF THE CROSS SEEN BY Z-CAR MEN

IT was just after four in the morning when the two Z-Car men first spotted the bright, pulsating light over a Devon road on the edge of Dartmoor.

The police car chased the unidentified flying object for 10 miles at speeds reaching 90 miles an hour.

'SPANGLED'

The nearest they got was about 40 yards. Then the object appeared to stop in a field. The men got out of their car – but the light vanished, nearly an hour after the first sighting.

The patrolmen – Police Constables Clifford Waycott and Roger Willey – said it was "a sort of flying cross much bigger than any star."

Said Police Constable Waycott, who was observer in the car which was patrolling the A3972 between Okehampton and Holworthy: "The light wasn't very piercing, but it was very bright. It was

star-spangled – just looking through wet glass and although we reach 90 miles an hour accelerated away from us.

The men also said that at one time another shining object appeared to join the first.

The light was also seen by officers at Okehampton police station.

The patrolmen were surprised by the sight that they woke a man sleeping in a Land-Rover. He was Christopher Garner, Marshwood Farm, Hatherleigh, who said: "I thought I was having a nightmare when I woke up. The object was much too bright for any star."

Mr. David Hill, chairman of the Exeter Flying Objects Research Group commented: "One of our observers said he saw an object similar to the one reported by the police from the ground and she was off at about 2,000 miles an hour."

JAMES WILKINSON WRITES: The Ministry of Defence said that the sighting seems to tie in with similar reports from the area in the past. A spokesman said: "I have insufficient evidence to identify the object at the moment."

ABOVE: The story of a Devon police car chasing a "flying cross" across Dartmoor in October 1967 made the national press.

One metallic object was found on a golf course

DI 55 was keen to examine any examples of space debris and wanted the police to ensure any examples were swiftly delivered to them for study. In the event, the spooks did not obtain a piece of the space station; it burned up harmlessly over the Indian Ocean on 11 July 1979, scattering pieces over a large area of the west Australian desert. But, as Skylab itself decayed, DI 55 was presented with two sets of "debris from space" which had fallen in Britain. One metallic object was found on a golf course in Eastbourne, while another specimen – consisting of 20 pieces of "rock-like debris" – woke a woman in North Wales when it crashed onto her roof at

Sam one June morning. Police dutifully divided the rocks into three samples, placed them in plastic bags and sent them to Whitehall, seemingly oblivious of any radiological hazard. What became of them is not known, but I suspect they ended up in a DI 55 wastebasket along with the lump of metal from Eastbourne which, on investigation, was determined to be "simply a piece of molten scrap metal".⁷

On the possibility that some UFOs might be intelligently controlled devices from other worlds, DI 55's conclusions are clear and uncompromising. The author of the Condign study noted in his final report, completed in February 2000, that "no artefacts of unknown or unexplained origin have been reported or handed to the UK authorities, despite thousands of UAP reports", and "there is no evidence that any UAPs are incursions by air objects of any intelligent (extraterrestrial or foreign) origin".⁸

Two years ago, I interviewed a retired intelligence officer who was responsible for the investigation of UFO reports at DI 55 during the mid-70s. He admitted that a number of the reports he received could not be explained, but said: "I tried to approach the subject with a totally open mind but none of the reports led me to believe that, apart from meteors, any of the objects reported were of extraterrestrial origin, and certainly none were under the control of an extraterrestrial intelligence."

He added one final "philosophical note" on the ET hypothesis. "I find it strange that, of all the interesting places there are in the Universe, an extraterrestrial intelligence would choose to visit a rather insignificant planet (the Earth) circling a rather ordinary star," he said. "One of the things I found strange about the whole business was that there were so many reports; I seem to remember at least half a dozen or more every day. Surely there could not have been that number of aliens?" FT

NOTES

- 1 DI 55 memo 'Public Access to UFO Files' dated 5 July 1995, released to author under FOIA 2005.
- 2 The UK security services (MI5, MI6 and GCHQ) are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act under Section 23 of the FOIA. The Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS), as part of the MOD, are subject to the Act.
- 3 TNA file AIR 2/17983 UFOs 1966.
- 4 TNA file DEFE 31/119 (UFO Policy 1967).
- 5 Nick Redfern: *Cosmic Crashes*, Simon & Schuster, 1998, ch14.
- 6 TNA file DEFE 44/210 (Analysis of Space Debris 1968).
- 7 DEFE 24/1566 (UFOs Satellite Debris).
- 8 Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in UK Air Defence Region (Condign report), Executive Summary, MOD, 2000.

Author biography



DAVID CLARKE teaches a course in supernatural belief at the Centre for English Cultural Beliefs at Sheffield University. He is a frequent FT contributor and columnist.

Don't Send in the Clowns

With celebrity coulrophobes in the media, evil clowns in the movies and traumatised children stricken with terror at the sight of red noses, **TIM WEINBERG** wonders just what it is about clowns that so disturbs us, while **BEN RADFORD** investigates the Phantom Clown panics that have gripped the USA.

To me, clowns aren't funny. In fact they're kind of scary. I've wondered where this started and I think it goes back to the time I went to the circus and a clown killed my dad
- Jack Hanley, *Saturday Night Live*

They wear masks and they have access to children
- Joseph Durwin, *Coulrophobia & the Trickster*

The most recent flurry of interest in coulrophobia - or fear of clowns - centred on the Isle of Wight and its residents' reluctance to host a dance festival where all the revellers were to attend in clown costumes. ¹ As inhabitants of the last place in Britain to convert to Christianity (AD 686), maybe the islanders were showing a natural resistance to invasion; or perhaps, as I hope to show, the thought of clowns also stirred up vague memories of an all-to-recent pagan past.

Having set a world record for the most Cowboys and Indians in one place at one time at *Bestival 2005*, festival organiser Rob Da Bank thought he'd have a bash at the clown world record in September 2006. With over 10,000 expected to attend in fancy dress, the resistance this proposal faced was immediate and overwhelming, from both islanders and other festival-goers. Rob immediately decided to change plans: "We have had so many people with clown phobias that I am worried everyone might end up hiding in the woods all weekend." ² Without referring to coulrophobia by name, a *Bestival* representative added: "Symptoms include shortness of breath, rapid breathing, irregular heartbeat, sweating, nausea and overall feelings of dread, although everyone experiences clown phobia in their own way and may have different symptoms." ³

As various media outlets began to carry the story, it became apparent that this wasn't entirely an isolated incident. Sarasota, Florida, is a legendary circus town boasting 15 major circus companies and was winter home to the Ringling Brothers Circus for over 30 years. When, in October 2005, city officials announced plans

"Shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat, sweating, nausea and feelings of dread..."

to erect 70 life-size fibreglass clowns in the downtown area, they were inundated with phone calls, email messages and in-person complaints, escalating in intensity and accompanied by threats of vandalism and violence. The final decision, in itself fairly bizarre, was to exhibit half the statues, only half the time. ⁴

For a brief period last summer, the Internet was awash with coulrophobes, and very often the testimonials were strikingly similar: "When I was eight, my mom took me to the circus... all through the show, this one clown kept looking at me. He even pointed once... anyway, I had to go to the bathroom... I heard footsteps, HUGE footsteps on the floor... that's when I saw the two big red feet. I screamed, I screamed loud." ⁵ Or how about Wallace, who first experienced clowns, aged six? "A clown got right up in my face and I could see his beard stubble under his make-up. He smelled bad and his eyes were weird... I guess I never got over it." ⁶ This sort of anecdote is typical, with children having been traumatised by a too-close encounter with a clown. ⁷

Another interesting angle on this phobia comes from Kathryn Cillick. Her theory is that a fear of clowns arises primarily because of their use of make-up. Because the smile is painted on, it's impossible to gauge a clown's real emotional state: "It [the make-up] renders the observer impotent in measuring facial expression as



RIGHT: Would you buy a painting by a killer clown? Coulrophobe Johnny Depp did.

a precursor of action... This is heightened when we observe the 'happy clown' performing some aggressive behaviour, it becomes too much to take, creating intense confusion and fear." In this scenario, coulrophobia seems akin to a leftover animal response rooted in self-preservation.

Neither are the rich and powerful immune to the clown's dubious charms; P Diddy, Billy Bob Thornton and Johnny Depp are all said to be sufferers. According to Depp: "There's something about the painted face and the fake smile. There seems to be a darkness lurking under the surface, a potential for real evil." This initially seems a very strange comment, considering some of Depp's cinematic creations (especially in collaboration with Tim Burton), like *Edward Scissorhands* or *Willy Wonka*, who are very much of the clown type, but it introduces the third strand of coulrophobia – that of self-recognition. We see something of ourselves in the clown and his behaviour, and this has the potential to severely unnerve us. The Depp anecdote then takes a strange turn: "Several years ago, Depp purchased a painting by John Wayne Gacy, the children's clown turned serial killer who tortured and killed 33 boys and young men. The painting was a self-portrait of Gacy as *Pogo the Clown*. They told me when I got it that the proceeds went to a charity or to the victims' families, or something, but I found out that wasn't the case."

Clearly, Depp's coulrophobia must be of a different type from that suffered by our traumatised children above; their phobia would never allow them to entertain the notion of buying a



CORBIS / REUTERS

THE EVIL CLOWN

TIM WEINBERG digs up the roots of clowns' portrayal as the Bad Guys in books and cinema.

'It would seem that the concept of evil clowns and the widespread hostility it induces is a cultural phenomenon which transcends just the phobia alone. Did it arise out of the phobia or the phobia out of it? And if people got their phobia out of the movies, where did the movies get the idea from?'

Joseph Durwin's question is notoriously difficult to answer with any certainty. When trying to unravel the strands that constitute coulrophobia, it actually makes the task more difficult. Yet on the other

hand, a fear of evil clowns cannot be considered a phobia – you'd be mad not to fear them!

Advocates of the 'all clowns are evil' theory only ever have two real witnesses for the prosecution: Pennywise the Clown, from Stephen King's novel *It*, and John Wayne Gacy, notorious serial killer in and around the Chicago area between 1975 and 1978. Gacy sometimes performed at children's parties and hospitals as Pogo or Patches the Clown; hence, supposedly, conclusive proof of the clown's murderous potential.



ABOVE: Pennywise the Clown from Stephen King's *It* – definitely bad.

Gacy was never a professional clown, neither did he commit any of his crimes while in 'motley and slap'; the myth of the Killer Clown is busted.

Of course, the Evil Clown isn't a new phenomenon. The Joker has been there since the very beginning of Batman's career, "a master criminal with a clown-like appearance... a violent sociopath who murders people for his own amusement", the grand-baddy of them all.

Cecil B DeMille's *Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), introduced Buttons the Clown (played by James Stewart). Here, the clown's make-up masked the fact he was really a killer on the run. Buttons's crime was to aid his terminally ill wife to die, thus adding pathos to the character (a staple characteristic of musical representations of the Clown, which unfortunately cannot be addressed here).

In Stephen King's *It*, one of the forms 'It' takes is Pennywise the Clown. All the other manifestations – spider, teenage werewolf, abusive parent – are fears the children have already imagined or experienced; only Pennywise has an independent existence, and

the reader becomes complicit in a secret known by children yet forgotten by adults – that clowns are inherently scary.

The book, however, goes one step further than its filmed counterpart (Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990): while the children are flicking through a book on Derry's history, they come across an image "probably from the early or mid-seventeen hundreds... the picture showed a funny fellow juggling oversized bowling pins". While the movie clearly shows Pennywise in a clown costume (which, of course, didn't exist at that time), the book continues: "He wore no make-up... but he was bald except for the tufts of hair that stuck up like horns... Bill had no trouble recognising the clown."

King's implication goes beyond the scope of the film; the clown isn't what's scary – he's merely one vessel (or mask) of many used by something far more diabolic.

NOTES

1 Joseph Durwin, "Coulrophobia & The Trickster", *Trickster's Way*, v3 No.1, 2004.

2 En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joker_(comics).

3 Stephen King, *It*, New English Library, 1992, p714.

4 Ibid, p715.

portrait of a clown painted by a murderer; there's something in Depp's actions that smacks of guilt and the need to make reparation. There are many ways of confronting one's fears; Johnny Depp's method (if these stories are true – no books on the actor refer to them), sounds extremely confused.

The Clown With a Thousand Faces

Already we have three strands of coulrophobia to consider: firstly, the traumatic childhood experience; secondly, the way the clown's lack of language means we search for meaning in its heavily made-up face, (which may be at odds with its emotions and/or actions); and thirdly, the shock of recognition, of something in the clown that holds a mirror up to the audience or viewer.

Or perhaps it's simpler than that. Ann Keong writes: "I think clowns by nature are very scary things. No associations needed. The size of the nose, the make-up, the lips the hair, the smile... to a kid, it is what a monster looks like." And the humour they present is excessive and unforgiving; whether balloons, cars or even his own trousers, the figure of the Clown takes everything he touches to beyond its limit and destroys it, seemingly taking a sadistic pleasure in that destruction. The audience is powerless during a clown's performance, both voyeur and (all too often) victim. As writer and comedian Eric Idle put it: "Clowns are grotesquely painted, horrifying mad people who come lurching towards us, threatening us, involving us... They know no boundaries... They scare us because they are most like us; they are adults who behave like children." But surely they also thrill us with antics usually forbidden? Do we perhaps live vicariously through the Clown's unapologetic transgressions?

A Freudian angle would seem a promising one to pursue in searching for what such a transgressive Clown figure might represent, but Freud himself – despite equating humour with a somewhat nebulous freedom from rationality – never gets to grips with the subject. In his defence, Freud was of course writing in the fin-de-siècle sophistication of Vienna, where "brutal hostility, forbidden by law, has been replaced by verbal invective". Clowning would have been seen as essentially vulgar and unworthy of serious analysis.

Turning elsewhere, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* is arguably the most influential social anthropological work of the late 20th century; and yet, even in this exploration of archetypal human myths, Joseph Campbell is notoriously reticent on the Clown, allowing it a mere paragraph's consideration: "Devils – both the lusty thickheads and the sharp, clever deceivers – are always clowns... they symbolise the inevitable imperfections of the realm of shadow." Campbell is writing specifically on creation myths, and the Clown here is closest in nature to the Serpent of Genesis or Satan of the Book of Job.

Unsurprisingly, it's Sir James Fraser in his (still unsurpassed) *The Golden Bough* who presents the best possibility for unlocking the Clown's secrets. In Chapter LVII, "Public Scapegoats", Fraser addresses the Roman Saturnalia, "when the whole population give themselves up to extravagant mirth and jollity, and when the darker passions find a vent which would never be allowed them in the more staid and sober course of ordinary life". This festival supposedly commemorated a Golden Age when Saturn ruled as a king on Earth, a time of blissful egalitarianism. To Fraser, the most striking thing about this festival was its anarchy: "[T]he distinction between the free and the servile classes was temporarily abolished. The slave might rail at his master, intoxicate himself like his betters, sit down at table with them, and not even a word

The sacrificial god of Saturnalia is nothing less than the spiritual ancestor of the clown



ABOVE: The Roman Saturnalia, "when the darker passions find a vent which would never be allowed them in the more... sober course of ordinary life".

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CORBIS KIPA / CAT'S COLLECTION

PHANTOM CLOWNS

BENJAMIN RADFORD casts a sceptical eye over the numerous reports from the USA of van-driving, child-stealing clowns gone bad...



CORBIS / ROBERT MAASS

On 5 May 1981, police in Brookline, Massachusetts, issued an All Points Bulletin asking officers to watch for a van containing potential child abductors. The vehicle was distinctive: an older model with a broken headlight, no hubcaps, and ladders on the side. Oh, and something else set it apart from most street vans: it was full of clowns. Several children reported that clowns had tried to lure them into the dark van with promises of candy, and the sinister whiteface vagabonds were later reported lurking near Brookline's Lawrence Elementary School.

It was only the latest in a series of mysterious threats by phantom clowns; the next day, Boston police again searched the city in vain for another van driven by a creepy clown. The man (and it apparently was a man, since he was said to have been in full clown regalia only from the waist up – his dangly, non-clowny bits fully on display) allegedly stalked nearby Franklin Park. No one else saw the clown, and police searches once again came up empty.

As reports spread to surrounding areas and parents grew nervous, Boston Public School's Investigative Counsellor Daniel O'Connell issued a memorable memo to principals in his school district: "It has been brought to the attention of the police department and the district office that adults dressed as clowns have been bothering children to and from school. Please advise all students that they must stay away from strangers, especially those dressed as clowns."

The New England reports subsided, but the clowns soon reappeared in Missouri. A sixth-grader at Fairfax Elementary School in Kansas City who saw a bad clown lurking at her school described the man to the *Kansas City Star*: "He was by the fence and ran down through the big yard when some of the kids ran over there. He ran toward a yellow van. He was dressed in a black shirt with a devil on the front. He had two

candy canes down each side of his pants. The pants were black too... I don't remember much about his face." Yet no evidence of the phantom clown could be found – not a vinyl petal from a squirting rose, not even a size 24 shoe print.

Parents were fearful, children were warned, and police were vigilant, but despite searches and police checkpoints stopping cars with clowns (surely an actionable case of illegal profiling), the phantom clowns were never captured. (I can just picture the searches: a police officer stops a Honda Civic driven by a clown. He asks to see identification, then asks the clown to get out of the car. He does – followed by another, then another, and another, and another, and another, and another. Soon, 20 clowns with big, floppy shoes and tiny hats are standing around the car, holding their IDs, and the cop is calling for backup.)

Some people began to wonder who the clowns were, what they wanted; others wondered if they existed at all. Former *Fortean Times* columnist Loren Coleman was one of the first to write about the phantom clowns, primarily in his book *Mysterious America*. Coleman writes that "something quite unusual was happening in America in the spring of 1981... The appearance of phantom clowns in the space of one month in at least six major cities spanning over 1,000 miles [1,600km] of America constitutes a genuine mystery."

An article on the *Unsolved Mysteries* website takes the threat quite seriously: "The denizens of the netherworld have apparently dreamed up a new nightmare to shock us. The cosmic joker is alive and well and living in a clown suit!

SEVERAL CHILDREN REPORTED THAT CLOWNS HAD TRIED TO LURE THEM INTO THE VAN

PLEASE, HELP KEEP OUR CHILDREN SAFE!" (excessive, credibility-eroding capitalisation in original).

Elsewhere, Patrick Harpur suggested in his Daimonic Reality blog that the phantom clowns were actually part of a covert government conspiracy operation designed to diminish the credibility of child eyewitnesses: "Perhaps a 'clown op' was run to discredit the testimony of children... and lead the public toward discounting even more nightmarish mysteries." Yet another "expert" suggested that the phantom clowns were in reality "ghost clowns", and refers to the Kansas City report as "perhaps the most frightening haunting."

Like Bigfoot, Santa Claus, and the Men in Black, these bad clowns were occasionally reported but never left hard evidence of their existence. Some reporters, such as Lucinda Smith of New Jersey's *Montclair Times*, poured cold water on the stories: "Someone dressed as Homey the Clown is not in Montclair trying to hurt children... And none of the following has been seen in a van attempting to kidnap children in Montclair: Homey, Krusty the Clown, the four Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the Smurfs, Bugs Bunny, the Little Mermaid, Barbie, Ken."

Sceptics noted that it was invariably young children who reported seeing the clowns; adults never encountered them. Perhaps the government "clown op" handlers issued their clown agents invisibility dust. Or perhaps the kids' imaginations had gotten the better of them.

It's important to understand the social context of these phantom clown reports: they occurred in the early 1980s and 1990s, at a time when the bad clown was entering the public consciousness in the form of books such as Stephen King's *It* and films such as *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*. More importantly, it was precisely a time when a moral panic gripped America. A *moral panic* is a sociological term meaning a social reaction to a perceived threat to basic values by "outsiders" and moral deviants. A clearly defined "other" is blamed or scapegoated for real or perceived threats – often to children. At the time, a rash of lurid, sensational (and later disproven) child abuse cases horrified America. Children accused adults of ritual rapes, torture, and abuse, and the news media further sensationalised the stories (see **FT152:40-44**). These reports closely coincided with the phantom clown scares.

Not far from phantom clown-haunted Boston, Gerald Amirault, his mother Violet Amirault, and his sister Cheryl LaFave were accused of torturing children at the Fells Acres Day Care Center in Malden, Massachusetts. Children claimed that they had been subjected to threats and abuse, including one child who said that they had been tortured by a "bad clown" in a "secret room."

Several other notorious cases appeared across the country, including the Little Rascals and the McMartin Preschool trials (for more on this topic, see chapter 12 of my book *Media Mythmakers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us*). Children's stories included tales of being abused in a secret tunnel underneath a school; being taken to a church where strangers killed a rabbit and forced them to drink its blood; children digging up dead bodies at a cemetery, and even more fantastic tales. As in the reports of phantom clowns, there was often little or no corroborating evidence to support the children's stories. The phrase "believe the children" was often heard, especially in the context of defending (sometimes outlandish and impossible) reports of abuse or attempted abductions.

According to folklorist Jan Brunvand, "the phantom-clowns tradition involving vans seems to be exclusively a part of folklore, perhaps reflecting children's actual distrust and even fear of clowns, who, ironically, are thought by adults to be invariably amusing to youngsters, most of whom would undoubtedly prefer a large, friendly, purple dinosaur to a clown any day."

Throughout the sporadic bad clown reports, no hard evidence was ever found, and no children were actually abducted. This interesting element strongly suggests that some form of social delusion or mass hysteria was at play. If the clowns were real, why were they so incompetent at actually grabbing the little rugrats? Surely at least one of the bad clowns would have succeeded, instead of always "just missing". Perhaps children made up the stories to fit in, or because they had heard their peers say the same thing (this occurs in many mass hysteria cases, including one I investigated in 2001 concerning the Pokemon cartoon inducing seizures in Japanese children; see **FT149:36-40**). Though adults often assume that young children would not make up a false story of an attempted abduction, in fact dozens of such hoaxes occur each year in America.

Whether "real" phantom clowns or mass hysteria, reports surfaced once again in 1995, though the clowns had upgraded and gone foreign instead of domestic. Instead of a beat-up van with missing hubcaps, these clowns were decked out in Volvos. (Whether they included umbrella-accommodating sunroofs and spritzer bottle cup holders is not reported.) In Honduras, reports circulated that "killer clowns" were cruising the streets of large cities like Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula in cars or ambulances, abducting children. The rumours gave clowns such a bad name that 60 professional clowns publicly burned their costumes in protest. The phantom clowns once again disappeared, but it seems unlikely that the world has seen the last of them...

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BENJAMIN RADFORD has investigated mysterious phenomena for over a decade. He is author or co-author of three books, and writer/director of the short animated film *Clicker Clatter*. He is completing a book about bad clowns, and his website is www.RadfordBooks.com.



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

ABOVE: Joseph Grimaldi, still celebrated as the first and greatest British clown.

of reproof would be administered to him for conduct which at any other season might have been punished with stripes, imprisonment, or death." But this license had its price: "Thirty days before the festival they chose by lot from amongst themselves a young and handsome man who was then clothed in royal attire to resemble Saturn... he went about in public, with full license to indulge his passions and to taste of every pleasure, however base and shameful. But if his reign was merry, it was short and ended tragically; for when the thirty days were up and the festival of Saturn had come, he cut his own throat on the altar of the god whom he personated."

So what of clowns?

Put simply, the sacrificial god of Saturnalia is nothing less than the spiritual ancestor of our modern clown. Unconvinced? Our archetypal modern clown is Joseph Grimaldi (see "The Clown Service"), who took the Italian Commedia dell'Arte and mixed it with an already extant, earthy, English humour.¹⁵ The precise origins of Italian Comedy remain obscure, but Fraser speculates on the subject: "The resemblance between the Saturnalia of ancient and the Carnival of modern Italy has often been remarked... in the countries where the influence of Rome has been deepest and most lasting, a conspicuous feature of the carnival is a burlesque figure personifying the festive season... this grotesque personage is no other than a direct successor of the old King of the Saturnalia, the master of the revels, the real man who personated Saturn and, when the revels were over, suffered a real death in his assumed character."

The frightening theological implication is that the Clown died for our sins (or perhaps our liberation). With the freedom he represents comes the knowledge that the Clown's transgressions can lead to his death. As one anonymous writer put it: "Clowns are unimpressed with sacred ceremonies or the power of rulers; they are blasphemous and defiant."¹⁶

THE CLOWN SERVICE

TIM WEINBERG paid a visit to Holy Trinity Church, Dalston, to take part in a very unusual service...



Then the Fool became the clown in pantomime, complete with red-hot poker and string of sausages. The first true clown, Joe Grimaldi, was known as the 'Garick of Clowns' and 'Hogarth in Action', thus testifying to his essential Englishness in a period when 'British clowns enjoyed the highest reputation' throughout Europe.¹

The 61st Annual Grimaldi Service² was held on 4 February this year, following the tradition of its customary celebration on the first Sunday in February.

Starting after World War II, it was at first an informal meeting (at St James Church, Islington) of clowns brought together by the fact that the great Joseph Grimaldi was buried in the churchyard. February was chosen either as the month many circuses were performing in London or because many tended to spend the winter there.

In 1959, the service moved to Holy Trinity Church, Dalston, east London (St James has been demolished, while its graveyard is now the Grimaldi Memorial Garden); its defining moment came in 1967 when Smokey the Clown gained permission for clowns to attend in costume and make-up. The service has remained in Dalston for 40 years, attracting increasing media coverage – which culminated in its being filmed for a special edition of the BBC's *Songs of Praise* in 2001 (fittingly broadcast on April Fool's Day).

The service is open to all, irrespective of religious beliefs; although thanking God for the gift of laughter and remembering those who've passed away in the previous year, it is held primarily to honour 'the father of present day clowns', Joseph Grimaldi (1778–1837). Regarded as the first and greatest British clown, Grimaldi was of Italian descent although he was born and spent his entire life in London. His father, Giuseppe Grimaldi, was an accomplished

dancer and pantomimist and had the young 'Joey' on stage at Sadler's Wells theatre by the age of three. From Joey's debut in *Mother Goose* at Covent Garden in 1806, he was completely adored by the British public and remained at the top of his game for 20 years. He never performed in circuses, bringing his clowning to full-length pantomimes often especially written for him. By all accounts, he was a great and versatile performer, a master of facial and bodily expressions and possessed of a unique sense of timing. But Grimaldi's ultimate legacy was to develop the pantomime character of the Commedia



HOLY TRINITY TURNS INTO A MADHOUSE FOR ONE DAY OF THE YEAR

LEFT: The 61st Annual Grimaldi Service.
BELOW: Mr Jam outside Holy Trinity church.

dell'Arte into what we now simply take for granted as the Clown; it was Grimaldi who emphasised the make-up, adding large amounts of garishly-coloured 'slap' to his mouth, eyebrows and cheeks over his white-face. The most distinctive element of his own image were the large red triangles on his cheeks.³ His influence on the development of a British comedic tradition was so great that for 50 years clowns rarely wavered from the forms he'd developed and no less a personage than Charles Dickens wrote his biography.⁴

I was lucky enough to attend this year's service. Perhaps numbers were down on previous years, or the press release had exaggerated, but there the clowns were to be counted in dozens, dwarfed in number by the media present. I couldn't help but wonder if this was a sign that clowning itself was in decline; most of the clowns I met were middle-aged, and there didn't appear to be many younger performers coming through to replenish the stock. The regular parishioners were welcoming, yet one couldn't help feeling they were looking forward to when all the fuss would be over; a lovely church with good, God-fearing people, Holy Trinity turns into a madhouse for one day of the year – clowns burst

out of cakes and ran down the aisle, the congregation were invited to sing *Y.M.C.A.* and shake their tail-feathers to *The Birdy Song*. I couldn't help feeling (and secretly hoped) that a little of the anarchy that was Saturnalia was still with us.

Clowns, it seemed to me, are a little like freemasons (although I'm not sure either would enjoy the comparison): a worldwide fraternity, proud of its traditions, generally (and genuinely) concerned with philanthropic endeavours and largely unaware of (or bemused by) the suspicion and hostility they inspire in others.

A big thank you to Rev. Rose Hudson-Willis.

NOTES

- 1 Roly Bain, "Clowns and Augustus", in *Victorian Britain*, ed. Boris Ford, 1989/92, p.300.
- 2 It was also the 60th anniversary of Clowns International, "the oldest established clowns' organisation in the world... It is non profit-making, non-political, non-sectarian and non-sexist". See www.clowns-international.co.uk. Note also *The World Clown Association*, founded 1983, which held its first convention outside the US in 1991 in Bognor Regis, West Sussex.
- 3 This image was faithfully recreated at the service by Lord Pandrum who performed Grimaldi's *Hot Coddins*.
- 4 *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, Edited by 'Boz'. Collected works of Charles Dickens.

The Clown and the Fool

It may appear a tenuous link at this point to look at *The Fool* of the Tarot deck, (specifically, Aleister Crowley's *Thoth* deck), but it offers further insight into the Clown, or rather the impulses the Clown-figure embodies. Consider also that although legend traces Tarot back to ancient Egypt, the fact is that the cards have never been traced back with any certainty beyond northern Italy in the first half of the 15th century – making the deck's origins entirely contemporary with *Commedia dell'Arte*. If Frazer is correct and residual memories of Saturnalia remained in Italian Comedy, isn't it fair to suggest that these meanings also lie hidden in the Tarot?¹⁷

For those unfamiliar with the Tarot deck, of the 78 cards, 22 are called *Major Arcana* (similar to *Trumps*), and *The Fool* is right at the head of the parade: "In essence, there are not really twenty-two trumps; there is only one – *The Fool*. All the other trumps live inside (and issue from) the Fool. Of all 78 tarot cards, none is more revered and misunderstood."¹⁸

If proof were needed of the direct link between *The Fool* of the Tarot and more prosaic clowning then Lon Milo DuQuette notes (with some delight), when discussing early drafts of Lady Frieda Harris's design, that "two of them bore the unmistakable image of Harpo Marx."¹⁹ (Harpocrates, the Greek god of innocence, one incarnation of *The Fool*, was also mute.)

The Fool stands for "idea, thought, spirituality... it represents an original, subtle, sudden impulse or impact, coming from a completely strange quarter". But in material matters the card can mean "folly, eccentricity or mania".²⁰

Anton Adassinski, founder of Russian clown troupe *Derevo*, shares this belief of the Clown as mystic and prime mover: "There is one string between universal chaos and our planet, a string that is laughter. When you laugh, you connect yourself again with chaos. Which is



LEFT: *The Fool* from Aleister Crowley's *Thoth* Tarot.

why when we find something funny the body suddenly moves in this uncontrollable way. The clown is the person who can pull the string and turn the Universe upside down and show people there is another way to live, another magical reality."²¹

While not belittling those for whom coulrophobia has very real physical and psychological consequences, it's hard to feel much sympathy for our previously mentioned celebrity triumvirate, known for changing identities more often than their underwear, often playing 'clown-like' characters and (if we're to believe the press) collectively possessing an armful of other phobias and hang-ups; folly, eccentricity and mania indeed.

For the potential coulrophobe, I've drawn up a short self-assessment test. (Please note, these phenomena may not be necessarily exclusive).

Are you scared by the way clowns look?

Is your fear based on a bad experience (as a child at the circus? Or at a party perhaps?)

Is clowns' reliance on mime and exaggerated body language confusing and/or frightening on a pre-linguistic level?

Is your fear of clowns based on negative stereotypes such as Pennywise the Clown in *It*, or John Wayne Gacy?

Are you subconsciously associating the clown with any/all of the following: *King of the Saturnalia*, *the Lord of Misrule*, *King of the Bean*, *Bishop of Fools*, *Abbot of Unreason*, *the Green Man*, *Dalua*, *Parsival*, *Harpocrates* or *Dionysus*?²²

So remember, next time you feel a fear of, or violent antipathy towards, clowns: it might be the stirrings of a long-forgotten pagan self deep in your subconscious. ²³



Author Biography

TIM WEINBERG would like to make it clear he isn't particularly prejudiced against clowns; he just wouldn't want his sister to marry one (unless, of course, it was Chuckles, Conk, Boris or Mister Jam!).

NOTES

- 1 "Fears of a clown", *The Sun*, 8 July 2006.
- 2 "Don't Send in the Clowns", *Isle of Wight County Press*, 6 July 2006.
- 3 Ibid. It is difficult to place the origin of the term *coulrophobia* with any certainty. Not known before the 1980s, it's based on the Greek *koulon* (limb), suggesting stunts and stilt-walking.
- 4 Alex Waterfield: "Fear of Clowns: No Laughing Matter", *Columbia News Service*, 27 Dec 2005. Waterfield sensationally states: "Although there are no official statistics, some experts believe that as many as one in seven people experience some level of Coulrophobia."
- 5 "Ryan", "Stories from you II", www.clownz.com.
- 6 Waterfield, op. cit.
- 7 Coulrophobia triggered by a childhood trauma is the explanation favoured by Steven Luel, 'a psychologist in New York specialising in anxiety and phobias,' quoted in the same article.
- 8 See www.phobialist.com.
- 9 Quoted at both www.skyone.co.uk/programmes/shocktreatment/celebrityphobias and <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/Wolfiles>.
- 10 "Stories for you II", www.clownz.com. On a recent *All Star Family Fortunes* (UK), 100 people were asked to 'name something a clown has'; the red nose and big feet accounted for 61 per cent of the answers given. (Please note, there didn't appear to be outbreaks of hysteria and panic among the audience during this segment of the show.)
- 11 "Masks of Magick Series #1: Clowns & Coulrophobia" at joe.durwin.net.
- 12 *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. VIII*, Vintage Books, 2001, p.102.
- 13 Joseph Campbell: *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Fontana Press, 1993, p.294.
- 14 This and the following quotes from Fraser are taken from *The Golden Bough*, Chancellor Press, 1994, p.583–586.
- 15 See *I Saw You, Missis*, in Peter Ackroyd's, *Albion*, Vintage, 2004.
- 16 Quoted at www.cabinet-des-dees.com/issue2/trickster.html.
- 17 The reader should also note Gurdjieff's theories on *Legomimisms*, or man-made objects that intrinsically hold information and secrets for the initiate. Tarot Cards supposedly belong to this order, along with Chess and ancient antiquities such as the Pyramids (See *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, 1949).
- 18 Lon Milo DuQuette: *Understanding Aleister Crowley's Thoth Tarot*, Weiser Books, 2003, p.97.
- 19 Ibid., p.97.
- 20 Ibid., p.278.
- 21 Quoted at www.phobialist.com.
- 22 The first five archetypal figures are courtesy of Frazer, the balance, Crowley.

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Editor's note: See also "A Circle of Clowns" by Bob Tarte and Bill Holm [FT38:46-48].

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MUSEUM

THE CLOWNS GALLERY & MUSEUM

All Saints Centre, Haggerston Road, Hackney E8 4HT. Phone: 0870 1284336

Run by Clowns International, this is the only museum in Britain dedicated to the history of clowning and clowns. A wide variety of exhibits on show.

The museum is open on the first Friday afternoon of every month from noon to 5pm. Parties should advise the manager in advance or to arrange alternative visit days.

AMAZING

Even in an age of shrinking habitats and ecological disasters, the animal kingdom can still yield amazing discoveries. As **DR KARL SHUKER** reports, Dutch zoologist Marc van Roosmalen has uncovered a marvellous menagerie of mammals in the vast green heartland of Brazil.



Map of Amazonia with brown areas indicating presence of new species

During the 1990s, Vietnam was the place to be for cryptozoological discoveries – hosting a startling number of new mammalian finds (see my article on these, FT91:42–43). Now, during the ‘noughties’, a new locality has gained ascendancy in the cryptozoological world – Amazonia, the vast green heartland of Brazil.

One man has achieved a unique distinction in unveiling an unparalleled number of new mammals in this verdant wilderness. Winner of one of *Time Magazine*’s illustrious ‘Heroes for the Planet’ environmental awards in 2000, he is Dutch zoologist Dr Marc van Roosmalen (right), who has been conducting field research in Brazil for several years. For much of that time, I have been in touch with him, and when he knew that I was preparing my book *The New Zoo: New and Rediscovered Animals of the Twentieth Century* (2002) – a greatly expanded, updated version of my 1993 book *The Lost Ark* – he very kindly provided me with a welter of information and illustrations concerning the several new species and subspecies of Amazonian monkey that he had already discovered and formally named, as well as a new species of tree porcupine.

Amazingly, however, even these have now proven to be little more than the tip of an incredible crypto-iceberg. During the past few years, many rumours have circulated online and among cryptozoologists concerning much bigger mammals, all allegedly new to science, that Marc had uncovered, but no one seemed very sure whether any of them were real. A few months ago, however, Marc updated me on what he had been finding, and I was stunned to learn that the truth was far more extraordinary than any rumour.

Marc has now established his own website – www.marcvanroosmalen.org/ – which not only documents his recently described new monkeys and details of his other fieldwork, but also includes descriptions and photos of over two dozen totally new, large (sometimes very large) mammals that he has discov-

ered and which await his formal description and naming. Of these, the giant peccary has just been described and named in the scientific journal *Bonner Zoologischen Beiträge* (see my Alien Zoo column on p24 for details and a photo). For the others, this article marks their debut within a hardcopy Fortean/cryptozoological publication, and is written with full support from Marc – who has also most generously provided me with exclusive access to a series of papers he has co-authored that officially describe and name some of the new mammalian taxa documented here, and which now await scientific publication.

Faced with such an exceptional array of new mammals, space permits only the most concise descriptions here, and I strongly recommend readers to check out Marc’s website for further information. So here is Marc’s truly marvellous menagerie of newly disclosed wonders from the Amazonian rainforests.



AMAZONIA



ARBOREAL GIANT ANTEATER

Unlike the tamandua and silky anteater, the giant anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* is terrestrial. However, Marc has discovered a tree-climbing form of giant anteater, previously undocumented, which is almost as big as the more common ground-dwelling version but climbs by grasping with its hindfeet, and has distinctive neck markings. Marc is not releasing any details concerning its distribution until he has obtained a type specimen (holotype) for formal description.

BLACK DWARF TAPIR

Much smaller and darker than Brazil’s familiar reddish-brown lowland tapir *Tapirus terrestris* (and indeed, seemingly the smallest living species of tapir now known to science), the black dwarf tapir is referred to locally as the *anta preinho* (‘little black tapir’), and appears to be restricted to the lower and middle part of the Rio Aripuanã basin. Data contained in Marc’s official description of this new species, currently awaiting publication, disclose that it is not only considerably smaller than other tapirs but also has a unique dentition, as well as taxonomically significant differences in its mitochondrial and nuclear DNA. Outwardly, it is recognisable by virtue of its size, coloration, and lack of white tips to its ears. This new species’ holotype is the skull of an adult female killed for food by a local hunter on 2 May 2006, close to the settlement of Tucunará, along the Rio Aripuanã’s left bank.



DWARF MANATEE

Classed by Marc in his formal description (presently under review for future publication) as a subspecies of the Amazonian manatee *Trichechus inunguis* with a length of only 4ft 3in (130cm), this freshwater mini-manatee is the smallest of all living sirenians, and is adapted for an existence in clear, fast-flowing, shallow streams where it browses horizontally on bottom-dwelling, non-floating plants. In grave danger of extinction, the only known viable population is limited to the Rio Arauazinho, a 75-mile (120km)-long left bank tributary of the Rio Aripuanã. In 2004, Marc was able to film, photograph, and examine a living adult male dwarf manatee in its natural habitat.

BLACK GIANT OTTER

Slightly smaller than the known giant otter or saro *Pteronura brasiliensis*, this new form is also readily distinguished by its near-black pelage, differing markedly from the saro’s brown fur. Further details concerning it are classified until enough evidence for its existence has been amassed for publication.

RIO ARIPUANÃ RIVER DOLPHIN

Known to occur only in the clear-water Rio Aripuanã as far upstream as the Periquito Falls and as far downstream as its river mouth, this freshwater dolphin is swiftly distinguished from the pink-coloured Amazonian boto *Inia geoffrensis* by its grey skin, and by lacking the boto’s long beak and swollen brow. This new dolphin also has a different breathing rhythm from the boto, and is said by locals to be more aggressive.



MONKEYS OF MANY KINDS

Continuing his astounding success at discovering new species of South American monkey, Marc may have as many as 17 more presently awaiting formal description. These include three new woolly monkeys (most dramatic of which is a bright ginger-orange form originally made known to science as far back as 1935 but afterwards forgotten), four new spider monkeys, a white bald-headed uakari, a marmoset, a squirrel monkey, two tamarins, two titis, and three sakis. All of these are documented by Marc on his website.



GREY AGOUTI, AND AGOUTI-FURRED ACOUCHY

Pacas are closely related to agoutis – speaking of which, Marc has also discovered an apparently new agouti, distinguished from all previously described species by its pale grey fur (the other agoutis' fur ranges from pale orange through several shades of brown to near-black), and found only along the Rio Aripuanã's left bank. Also related to pacas and agoutis are the two known species of acouchy, one red-furred, the other olive-green, but in the Rios Tapajós / Amazonas / Madeira interfluvial region Marc has on many occasions observed an agouti-shaded acouchy readily distinguishable from both of the two currently recognised species.

GIANT PACA

The two currently recognised species of paca are almost tailless rodents up to 2ft (60cm) long and 11lb (5kg) in weight, and adorned with usually four longitudinal rows of white spots on each side of their blackish-brown furred body. However,

Marc has encountered – and collected – a much larger form of paca, known locally as the *paca concha*. It appears to have a very wide distribution range, and is distinguished from the two recognised species by its greater size, weighing up to 26.5lb (12kg), its lighter fur colour, and the merging of most of its spots into long-

ORANGE PECCARY

As its name suggests, this peccary is recognisable by its orange pelage and modest size. It lives in small groups in Amazonia, and appears distinct not only from the two previously known peccary species living here (collared peccary and white-lipped peccary) but also from the two other new ones lately revealed by Marc (giant peccary and white-hoofed peccary).

ORANGE COATI

As documented in Marc's formal description, awaiting publication, this striking creature is distinguished from the familiar ring-tailed coati *Nasua nasua* by its bright orange fur, larger size, tendency to move about only in pairs rather than large troops, and fiercer demeanour. Several hitherto unrecognised specimens of this form are present in the zoological collections of Brazil's Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi.

WHITE BROCKET

This small deer differs from the other two brockets – the reddish-brown *Mazama americana* and the greyish *M. nemorivaga* – that cohabit lowland Amazonia not only by virtue of its whitish-brown pelage but also by being intermediate in size between them, and by way of its shorter but thicker, spike-like antlers. Ironically, although not previously known to science, the white brocket is the most commonly hunted of the three brockets here. Marc has prepared for future acceptance and publication a formal description of the white brocket, naming it as a new species, based upon material collected.

itudinal lines. In a paper awaiting publication, Marc has named this form as a new species. Several suspected specimens of giant paca are held at Brazil's Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, where Marc's holotype of this new species, killed for food by a local hunter on 28 May 2006 near Tucunará, has now been deposited.

ORANGE TAYRA

This is yet another orange-furred novelty, thereby differing noticeably from the normal black-furred tayra *Eira barbara* (a large member of the weasel or mustelid family pictured below), and also lacking the latter's yellow throat patch. Marc is not releasing any distribution details concerning this creature until he has obtained holotype material.



WHITE-HOOFED PECCARY

This new form is similar to the white-lipped peccary – except that it lacks a white lip! It is also distinguished by its white hooves. Marc has seen entire herds of white-hoofed peccaries, and actually maintained a female specimen, named Piggy, in captivity in his compound until she was killed by some intruding local hunters.



WHITE-THROATED BLACK JAGUAR

Last, and most mysterious of all, this unclassified big cat, known locally as the *onça-cangaçu* ('bigger jaguar that goes in pairs'), resembles a very large black (melanistic) jaguar – but, uniquely, has a white throat and a tufted tail. Moreover, unlike normal melanistic jaguars, which when viewed at certain angles can be seen to be rosetted, the *onça-cangaçu* is pitch-black with no coat patterning whatsoever. Marc has yet to see this creature personally, and also narrowly missed the opportunity to inspect one pelt – a hunter who had killed one of these cats threw its pelt away shortly before Marc arrived asking about this feline cryptid. Happily, he now has both a pelt and a skull, which should assist in determining the *onça-cangaçu*'s zoological status.

How many of these 31 mammalian novelties will prove to be new species or new subspecies, or merely local colour morphs or varieties, has still to be seen. Yet whatever they are, they are all sufficiently different from their closest previously known counterparts to deserve formal investigation and documentation. Equally, Dr Marc van Roosmalen deserves international recognition and acclaim for providing dramatic, unequivocal evidence of the extraordinary diversity of wildlife still awaiting discovery within the Brazilian rainforests, which in turn underlines how great the loss will be to our world if deforestation in this

uniquely rich ecosystem continues. Marc urgently needs support and sponsorship to continue his invaluable studies in Amazonia, so if the amazing discoveries documented here have excited and alerted you to the immense potential for future cryptozoological finds, please visit Marc's website, and offer him whatever assistance you can. After all, it's not every day that offers you the opportunity to be instrumental in securing the continuing existence of such fascinating cryptozoological creatures as these (and no doubt others too), already in danger of extinction even as they stand at last on the very brink of scientific acceptance.

STOP PRESS

On 26 June 2007, the world's media carried some truly shocking, totally unexpected news concerning Dr Marc van Roosmalen. Marc van Roosmalen, 60, was arrested on 28 June 2007 for the alleged theft of 28 orphaned monkeys. However, Marc himself is no longer there. Instead, he is in jail in Brazil, facing a sentence of 14 years behind bars, having been abruptly arrested and convicted by the Brazilian government on charges of biopiracy. They claim that he did not apply for a licence permitting him to open and maintain the monkey

range, and that the monkeys residing in it are therefore technically stolen. Marc is presently appealing against his sentence. Some media reports have claimed that his vociferous campaigning for conservation may have caused this 60-year-old zoologist and ardent conservationist to make powerful enemies in the logging industry and other big companies with major business interests in the Brazilian rainforest. www.radiationetherlands.nl/currentaffairs/bra070622 26 June 2007



City of Secrets

Just when you thought you knew everything there was to know about Rennes-le-Château and Abbé Saunière, along comes a new book by Patrice Chaplin offering a radical new take on the mystery and revealing a hitherto unknown connection with a secret society of Spanish Kabbalists. DAVID V BARRETT caught up with the author to discuss the unsettling experiences that form the basis of her book.

Rennes-le-Château? "You'll find nothing there... That's why the French priest came here. Girona always had the secret..."

Girona is a small city in the far north-east of Spain, just over the border from France. Back in 1955, a 15-year-old English girl, a wildly-dressed young Bohemian, discovered the town and fell in love with it, and with one of its sons, José Tarres. Patrice Chaplin told that story in her first autobiographical book, *Albany Park* (1986), followed by *Another City* (1987), which covered her time in Hollywood, her marriage to Charlie Chaplin's son, and her leaving him for José.

José was always a mysterious figure, and Girona a mysterious place. On the first page of *Albany Park*, she wrote of Girona: "It holds on to atmosphere. It makes sure the past is there always, unconquered by decay... At certain points across the earth the energy builds up and creates a pull, a pulse, and in these places unusual and mystical things can happen."

In her new book, *City of Secrets*, Patrice Chaplin reveals some of these unusual and mystical things. I met up with Patrice in the park at Primrose Hill, London, in early May, to delve a bit deeper.

A RITUAL OBSERVED

On first visiting Girona, aged 15, Patrice met Jean Cocteau, who immediately put her in a film he was making.

A little later, peering into a house near the filming, she observed a group of people, including Cocteau, chanting in a ritual. She met an old lady, a Frenchwoman, who sometimes lived in the house, which had a small tower attached. She found a fire-damaged priest's ring with the initials "BS". The name Saunière was mentioned; she asked who he was, and was told: "A priest from France."

That was back in the Fifties, long before *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), even before Gérard de Sède's *L'Or de Rennes* (1967), later retitled *Le Trésor maudit*, the book which began the whole Rennes-le-Château industry. (More on de Sède later.)

There seem to be two mysteries in Girona, interrelated: one is to do with the French priest Béranger Saunière, a name now all too well-known; the other is deeper, darker: a ritual, a ceremony, a small society of people protecting a secret, and José is involved in it somehow, and Patrice Chaplin keeps getting caught up on the edges of it.

At one point, she saw José when he had just been in a ceremony. He was staggering. He fell over. He had a chiming sound in his head. "I should not do this," he said. "You have to be strong and on a certain level to be there at all." Patrice asked him about the ritual. "People get too greedy," he replied. "They want to go too far, to be too empowered. With power they should not have."

Slowly, as the book progresses through the years, we discover something of what this was all about – and the connection with Abbé Saunière.



ABOVE: Patrice Chaplin and José Tarres not long after they first met in Girona



ABOVE: Roger Mathieu, husband of Maria Tourdes, standing in front of the Torre Magdala in Girona – a structure that fascinated Abbé Saunière.



ABOVE: The Star of David on the floor of the courtyard of José's Kabbalah Centre in old Girona
OPPOSITE: One of the centre's exhibits was this menorah belonging to Nahmanides, one of the founders of Kabbalah

THE SECRET CEREMONY

In 1492, as well as Columbus sailing the ocean blue, Ferdinand and Isabella threw the Jews out of Spain. In the 1970s, José started digging beneath the streets of old Girona near the Frenchwoman's house, and discovered long-buried buildings and courtyards and a mediæval college: the old Jewish quarter. Girona had been the birthplace of Kabbalah; José had uncovered the 13th-century yeshiva, or school of Torah studies, where the famous rabbi Nahmanides, born in Girona, taught. Moses de Leon wrote the *Sepher ha Zohar* (Book of Splendour) near Girona, around 1280. José opened a restaurant on the site and set the Star of David in his patio. Eventually, he opened a Kabbalah Centre named after Isaac the Blind, another famous 13th-century rabbi who taught Kabbalah in Girona. If you do an online search for Girona and Kabbalah you'll find José Tarres, "a restaurateur and poet", right there at the start of all the discoveries.

Until then, most of the population of Girona had completely forgotten the town's Jewish heritage – but a small group had not. The ceremony, the ritual, which José and a handful of others had protected and performed for years, is Kabbalistic – and very, very powerful. José explains it like this:

"Cabbala in the Middle Ages is a complicated system where the nature of God and his way of creation are explained through the concept of the 10 'Sefirot', or emanations mediating between God and the world. Mastery of this system allows a mystic to achieve a powerful manner of prayer in which he helps God to become reunited with his exiled bride, the female principle, the Shechinah and so to mend the universe and bring about the Messianic age... That is what the Cabbalists achieved. They helped God mend this flawed world."

And this happened in Girona, he says: "This place has witnessed extraordinary events that are beyond human expectation." Not just in the past. Patrice arrived in Girona in 1976, just as over 100 people were witnessing a vision of the Magdalene, *La Dama de la Copa*, the Lady of the Cup, on a hill near the Frenchwoman's garden

"Girona has witnessed extraordinary events that are beyond human expectation"

– and just as, in the house, the ritual was being performed.

In the 1970s Patrice wrote a number of articles for the *Jewish Chronicle* to publicise what José had discovered and to raise funding. In one of them, she quoted him as saying: "There has always been something compelling and magnetic here. I think the pulse of that magnetism comes from this courtyard, the Cabbala leaving an undying imprint. The marvellous atmosphere is its legacy as well as the real contribution it has made to the development of human thought."

It should perhaps be stressed that there's absolutely no connection between the Kabbalah Centre set up by José in Girona, and the Kabbalah Centres with the orange thread and celebrity members like Madonna, or indeed with any other Kabbalah organisation. "A lot of people have gone down there over the years trying to take it over," Patrice tells me. "But now they've made it very safe. It's a museum, and it's scholarly, and people from Israel are invited, and New York. It's scholarly, and quiet." It's now owned by the city; having set it up in the first place, José is no longer involved.

In the Fifties and Sixties, José was a fervent Catalan nationalist, preserving Catalan culture against the centralising control of Franco, who loathed the region. A Spanish Humanities professor once told Patrice that without him the Catalan traditions would no longer be alive, she tells me with some pride, even after all these

years. "People see him as incredibly astute, and there's an acute consciousness that knows what the province should be, and without him a lot of the province and the traditions wouldn't be there. They see him now in a very serious way."

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

But what is the connection between Girona and Kabbalah and Abbé Saunière, priest and high-spending builder of Rennes-le-Château?

Part of the regular myth about Saunière is that he spent a lot of time away from Rennes-le-Château, though no one seems to know where he went. Now we have an answer: Saunière regularly took the train from Couiza, the nearest town to Rennes-le-Château, through Quillan to Perpignan, then from Perpignan over the border to Girona. He stayed in the house where Patrice first met Jean Cocteau and spied on him in a ritual. And at this house, in the mid-Fifties, Patrice met the elderly French lady, Maria Tourdes, with whom Saunière had stayed decades earlier.

Saunière, it seems, had learnt of the secrets of Kabbalah when he was at the seminary at Narbonne, which was the second centre of mediæval Kabbalah. "He gave what he uncovered to an interested party, a small piece at a time," Patrice was told. Saunière "was run" by the Rosicrucians, and behind them, the Habsburgs. Selling masses (often cited as the not-so-mysterious reason for the priest's sudden wealth) was simply a front – an explanation for the money he received, not the source of it.

And, with others, Saunière practised Kabbalah at Girona. José told Patrice that "less than a hundred years ago, certain mystically inclined individuals came here and repeated these ceremonies – for their own grandiosity, perhaps." These appear to have been members of l'Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose Croix, founded by Joséphin Péladan and the Marquis Stanislas de Guaita in 1888, based largely on the teachings of Éliphas Lévi – who wrote a great deal about the Girona School of Kabbalah.

At her house in Girona, Maria Tourdes gave "sophisticated evenings for visitors from Paris, intellectuals, artists, musicians, an opera singer, the aristocracy." One of those who visited Maria's house, Patrice says, was Debussy. The opera singer was society beauty and esotericist Emma Calvé.

But it goes back beyond Saunière. A century earlier, the priest at Rennes-le-Château, Abbé Antoine Bigou, fled France before the Revolution and came to Girona, bringing certain things with him, José told Patrice. "Some documents and ritual artefacts passed to and fro between Rennes-le-Château and Girona, over the centuries, depending on the state of warfare or plague." And here is the crux of the story: "There has always been a line of evolved priests, rabbis, doctors, mystics in a private society here or near here, taking care of the secret." A small handful of families kept it going over the years.

Patrice asked José if he'd wanted to be involved in all this. "Never," he said firmly. But he had had little option. "The responsibility had come into the care of his family – the canons in the cathedral – before 1851." José's mother had wanted him to train

as a mystic, "to go into a seminary. But not an ordinary one... And have instruction from a master. Not a priest as such," one friend told Patrice. José had refused, but he couldn't escape involvement in the society and its secrets completely.

In the mid-1950s, one of the people living in the same hotel and in the same group of friends as Patrice and José was a young man called Umberto Eco; he was never in the society, Patrice tells me, but some of the novel *Foucault's Pendulum* is apparently based on things he was told by José or another friend.

In 2004, Patrice returned to Girona to interview José and others she had known for most of her life for this book. The members of the society are getting old; some have died. José himself is in his seventies and has survived a heart attack. He wants the story to be told before it's lost.

In *City of Secrets*, there are photographs of letters from Saunière

to Maria Tourdes. Are they genuine? To my untutored eye, the handwriting looks much the same as other examples of Saunière's writing I've seen, such as his account books. In one letter he writes: "Take good care of yourself. I think of you pouring yourself a glass of wine in the garden and wearing your silk from Paris." In another he says: "I will arrive Wednesday late so please wait up for me." Were they lovers? Patrice thinks it likely. In letters to other people, Maria refers to him as "Berenger" [sic] rather than Abbé Saunière.

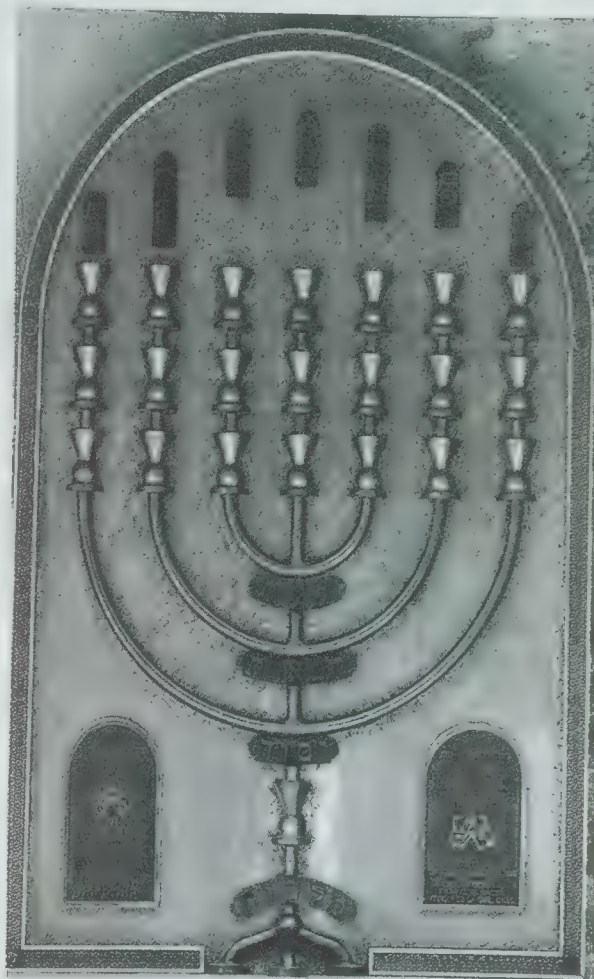
"I love this place. I feel so alive, so fortunate," Maria Tourdes wrote to a friend in 1897. "He arrived on Wednesday and we stayed in the garden well after dark; he is forever delighted by the sound of the bells, this city of bells that he finds glorious. It brings him out of himself. He is very kind and I feel transformed when he is here, as I should be."

"I don't know what will happen and for once I don't care. We laugh a lot, which will seem very inappropriate to you, yes, insanely inappropriate, but that's how things are when we're together and then he always has to leave, oh, so suddenly – and then I feel terribly alone."

Whether they were lovers or not, Maria was clearly in love with Abbé Bérenger Saunière, and her letters cast a whole new light on him.

José's great-uncle was a friend of Saunière. According to José, Saunière spent a lot of time travelling by train between Rennes-le-Château and Girona, and waiting nervously at the station at Perpignan. "He never knew if he'd get away with it and trains were always late in those days... He was always delayed getting back for Sunday service. One day he had to have a coach and horses to get him back from the border. My uncle told me. Later he hired a car and chauffeur."

And sometimes he didn't make it. There's a letter from Saunière to Marie Denarnaud, his maidservant back in Rennes-le-Château, sent back with his brother Alfred, also a priest, who was also involved in the mystery. "Yesterday, Guillem made a discovery that could be extraordinary if it is what I think it is, so I will have to stay here and won't be back on Sunday. Can you send the second letter to Carcassonne immediately?" Presumably, the letter asked for another priest to take the service for him.





ABOVE: An old postcard of Girona with the Torre Magdala visible towards the right. BELOW: Maria Tourdes writing at her desk.

THE TWO TOWERS

Patrice Chaplin first visited Rennes-le-Château in 1968, and had a frightening vision in the church. She returned some 20 years later and seemed to find the church uncomfortable; with the "droves of agitated seekers and so many flashing cameras... [t]here was not a sacred moment to be seen or felt." Outside, though, was different. "The view from the Tour Magdala was awesome, right across to the Pyrenees... Nobody knew the point of the tower or why it was there. Neo-Gothic, it was constructed in 1903. But what struck me immediately and with great force was its direct similarity to the Torre Magdala in the Frenchwoman's garden."

The house and tower in Girona are now demolished, but there are old photographs in the book.

I show Patrice a photograph of Saunière's tower and point out that the towers aren't identical in appearance. No, she says, but their dimensions are. A 1901 letter from Saunière to Maria, with a roughly sketched plan of the tower attached, asks her: "Can you find out the measurements of the foundations and if they know how that precise figure was arrived at? You will have to go and see the architect, or better still, ask Dalmas to go. He must get a copy of the plans."

In one of Maria Tourdes's letters, she mentions a piece of paper "covered with signs and words revealing a message, 'I know Sion'," and goes on to say "Bérenger [sic] did talk about North and South, explaining how they must be unified – I suppose they have to be in me too." The spiritual meaning of this may be hidden, but in the physical world, according to Patrice Chaplin, Saunière united north and south in 1903 by



One letter mentions a paper covered with signs and revealing a message: 'I know Sion'

building the Tour Magdala in Rennes-le-Château, copying the Torre Magdala at Maria's house in Girona.

"Saunière had to copy the measurements to get the energies to unite: the measurement and the directions – that's what he asked for. They all say that that's what he came to the town to do initially, to copy the tower. It wasn't a decorative copy; it was to set up what they called the Golden Cut," Patrice tells me. In the book, it's called "the magnetic path".

Late in the book, a present-day Kabbalist tells Patrice: "Saunière's work was to prepare the ground for the unmanifest messiah, who is in one of the Kabbalists' higher realms, to appear. As it is now, we are not prepared, unless people make the preparations to invite him to come. What Saunière had to do was to set up the plan for

SAUNIÈRE IN GIRONA: A TALE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC FAKERY



One of Patrice Chaplin's central claims in *City of Secrets* is that Bérenger Saunière travelled regularly from Rennes-le-Château to the Spanish city of Girona, where he enjoyed a relationship (of some kind) with a French woman named Maria Tourdes and found the inspiration for the Tour Magdala he famously built in Rennes.

Chaplin maintains that she has hard evidence of the Saunière/Girona connection in the form of letters authenticated as written in Saunière's handwriting, as well as numerous other documents, maps, diagrams, records of financial transactions and so forth, many of which relate to the now vanished house of Maria Tourdes and the Torre Magdala.

In a recent online interview with Chaplin on his Arcadia website (see www.andrewgough.co.uk/17questions_chaplin.html), Andrew Gough asked her why, given such a wealth of evidence, there were no photographs of Saunière in Girona. According to Chaplin, she met an old woman in Girona who had known Maria Tourdes; the 91-year-old gave Chaplin some 120 letters written by Tourdes and two old sepia photographs, all of which Chaplin hurriedly bundled together and took back to Britain. One photograph showed Saunière alone in Girona, another with children in the background; apparently, there was a third photo of Saunière in the garden of Maria Tourdes's house which Chaplin did not obtain.

Chaplin says that she gave the photos to her publisher to have them quickly copied before sending them back to Spain; it was only when the publisher saw them and thought that they looked 'strange' that Chaplin examined them for herself and, claiming a lack of photographic expertise, took them to a "much respected" man in Girona for his opinion: "He looked at them and said 'My God, no'. He said 'ditch these, this is discrediting'; so I said, 'What do you mean?', and he said 'You've gone too far with it now, you're being discredited, so what they're going to try and do is point the finger at the photographs and say how can she come out with these – these are not authentic, so her book is untrue.'" To Chaplin, this was further evidence of a concerted attempt to besmirch her work or prevent the book's publication.

So, while the photographs were dropped from the book, *FT* obtained copies of them, and we reproduce them here – along with the two photographs of Saunière that we realised had been used to produce them – as they throw an interesting additional sidelight on Chaplin's story. It's obvious that the pictures are clumsy fakes, but the question, of course, remains: Who was attempting to take whom for a ride here, and why? **DAVID SUTTON**



other people to follow when he'd passed over into the spirit world. He hid the secrets in symbolism. So the whole dialogue of his church and tower were symbols to hide the truth."

The two towers are shown in one of the Stations of the Cross in the church at Rennes-le-Château. What is significant, Patrice was told, "is what is between the two towers, what is in the middle, and that's the portal, that's what you have to find, that's what it's about." If you draw a line between the two towers, roughly half way between them is Mount Canigou, apparently "a place of great energy".

José told Patrice, "You have to unite the north with the south. Once they are brought together there is a super-consciousness and a higher plane is within reach. Then, the other realms can reach us." But he went on: "Saunière failed... He couldn't find the portal. He didn't finish what he had started." Then he added that with his Kabbalah Centre, "I was trying to complete the plan but I attracted unsuitable seekers. Like Saunière, I failed. And now the material isn't safe and, possibly, neither is this city."

There are overlaps between Patrice Chaplin's story and the "received myth" of Saunière and Rennes-le-Château. Sion is mentioned once or twice, but not the Priory of Sion. Jean Cocteau. Abbé Bigou. Emma Calvé. Even Ernest Cros, who in the standard story drew a tombstone which Saunière destroyed: he is present when Saunière first meets Maria Tourdes.

Gérard de Sède slips into the story as well. In the early Sixties, Patrice went to Paris with José to see the dying Maria Tourdes. José went off for a meeting with Cocteau, then they visited Maria, who was sitting up in bed, old and ill. She signed documents concerning the house in Girona, the house where Saunière had visited her so often: "As her hand took the pen, a ring she had been holding fell and rolled down the bedcover. I saw the burned metal and the initials BS." The reception room of her Paris apartment was full of "people smoking and talking, intellectuals mostly". One of them was a writer, and Maria said she would tell him "my life". José replied, "We both know biographies are novels in disguise."

The writer was Gérard de Sède, whose *L'Or de Rennes* was published in 1967, underpinning Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln's later work. De Sède's book, incorporating material from Pierre Plantard and Rennes restaurateur Noël Corbu, who bought Saunière's house, may have had, shall we say, some imaginative embellishments; but one wonders what elements of his story, if any, he took from the woman who may have been Saunière's lover.

It's important to note: there is nothing in Patrice Chaplin's book about Pierre Plantard; nothing about the Merovingians; nothing about the bloodline of Jesus. None of these is part of the secret story of Girona and Abbé Bérenger Saunière's involvement there.

SHARING THE SECRET

City of Secrets raises as many questions as it answers, but to many of my questions, Patrice replies with an honest "I don't know." She's just written down what she'd been told by José and others, and what she'd seen with her own eyes.

"I haven't made suppositions," she says. "I think if I start making them, it's going to confuse things even more." But there is more than appears in the book, which was heavily edited down from what she originally wrote: she tells me there is more Grail-like material, which might not appeal to the average reader: that's why her editor left it out.

But by Grail, she doesn't mean the archetypal chalice. One person in her book describes the Grail more in terms of the Phil-



LEFT: Patrice Chaplin.

osopher's Stone. The Kabbalists in Girona "had discovered the properties of the Grail, and from this time came their experiments transcending physical life." The Grail, she was told, "was purported to give powers beyond human reach including physical longevity, immortality, invisibility. Who holds this, holds the world." This, it seems, is the secret that José's family and others were protecting. And with something this explosive, it's not surprising that the ritual that the society performs is so powerful, and so potentially dangerous.

Or that some people are trying to hide it, some are trying to get hold of it, some are denying its

existence altogether, and people on all sides are warning Patrice not to get involved. From the beginning of the book to the end, there's a creepy priest who is somehow always around when she is asking questions, and always giving her deceptive answers. There's a northern European who offers money to find out about the society's meetings. There's a wealthy American writer who tries to buy José's Cabbala Centre. In the world of secret societies, people are often not who they seem, and their true allegiances are often unknown. Patrice Chaplin has been told, rightly or wrongly, that certain people in her story were working for the Freemasons, for the Vatican, even for the Bilderberg Group. Whether this is so or whether it's just the usual conspiracy theory obfuscation, who can tell? But the pressures on her were real.

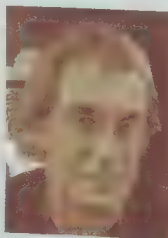
"There was a tremendous force for this not to have come out, even as much as it has. And trust me when I say, I haven't got the whole thing yet."

Researching and writing this book has taken its toll on her. "I wouldn't have done this book if I had known what I would have had to go through to do it, the price that's been paid, the darkness and stuff I've been through..." As we sit in the park on a gloriously sunny afternoon, Patrice visibly shivers. "If I had known I really wouldn't have gone through it. It's been hell. It killed something off inside me."

But there's been a magic to the story as well. The man whom the 15-year-old Patrice fell in love with half a century ago rediscovered the birthplace of mediæval Kabbalah, and she had a hand in making it all happen, raising money in the States, involving people from Leonard Bernstein to Henry Kissinger to Barbra Streisand. "I helped him with the Kabbalah Centre because if I hadn't intervened there would have been no money; it would have been closed down. So Girona owes me something. Maybe it owes me one, that's why they're giving me something."

And whatever the truth of Bérenger Saunière's visits to Maria Tourdes's house in Girona, and the secret society there, and the deep frightening power of the Kabbalistic ritual, José the poet should perhaps have the final word: "Just because we can't comprehend something doesn't mean it doesn't exist. I'd hate to think that what we understood was all there was." **FT**

City of Secrets by Patrice Chaplin is published in paperback by Robinson at £7.99.



AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DAVID V BARRETT regularly speaks on radio and TV on everything from Scientology to *The Da Vinci Code*. His book *The New Believers* is a comprehensive study of sects, 'cults' and alternative religions, and his new book *A Brief History of Secret Societies* is out now from Constable & Robinson. He plays fretless bass in the rock-jazz-blues band Midnight.

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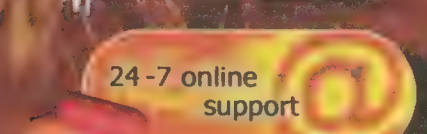
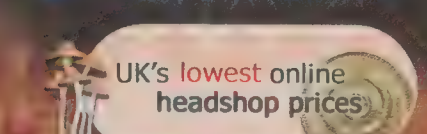
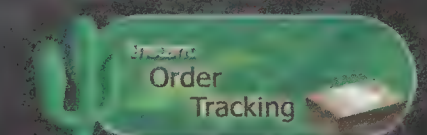
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UFOS AND HOLLYWOOD PART TWO: 1960-1979 A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

In the second of his four-part series on Tinseltown's stormy relationship with extraterrestrials, **ROBBIE GRAHAM** looks at how the 1960s and '70s saw an increase in UFO sightings but a falling-off in UFO movies as American society experienced massive social upheaval, and how a new vision of the alien helped save Hollywood.

Beginning in the late 1940s, and spreading like wildfire into the 1950s, flying saucer fever swept through every state of America as mysterious aerial objects were witnessed and reported in their tens of thousands; a situation that declassified documents now reveal shook the US government to its core. But while the startling implications of the saucers were played down by officialdom (initially for fear of mass panic, or worse) Hollywood exercised no such restraint. It milked this interplanetary cash cow for all it was worth, carelessly demonising Earth's potential extraterrestrial visitors in the process, for Hollywood's aliens were malevolent, parasitic... hostile. Worse still, they appeared to be communists! This frightful alien image was spoonfed to America by its most powerful and popular medium, and the nation ate it up. By the end of the decade, it was clear that flying saucers represented not only a genuine, tangible phenomenon, but a true cultural phenomenon also.

During the 1960s, the fascination of the saucers (by now more commonly referred to as 'UFOs') was diminished somewhat. Public interest in UFOs, though still considerable, took a back seat to more overt sociopolitical issues: civil rights, free love, Vietnam, women's

lib, political assassinations... this revolution, of sorts, paved a sprawling road to the future, and left many cultural artefacts from the previous decade – including flying saucers – strewn along the wayside.

Hollywood's output reflected these developments. Films about flying saucers and aliens all but disappeared from the big screen, and were replaced by more "soci-

ally conscious", highbrow science fiction fare such as *Planet of the Apes*, and Kubrick's epic *2001: A Space Odyssey* (both 1968). Simplistic B-movies of the tried and tested 'hostile alien' variety, such as *First Men in the Moon*, and *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (both 1964), seemed curiously out of place in America's rapidly expanding cultural landscape. Indeed, so far as UFOs and aliens were concerned,



public imagination was now being fed less by cinematic iconography than it was by real-life occurrences.

The 1960s witnessed some of the most important events in the history of ufology, including the apparent alien abduction of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961 (the first such event of its kind to be widely publicised), and, in 1964, the close encounter between police sergeant Lonnie Zamora and a landed UFO (complete with humanoid occupants) in Socorro, New Mexico. The decade also boasted a major American UFO wave, beginning in 1964 and peaking in 1966, during which literally thousands of UFO sightings were reported by seemingly reliable observers.

By this point, though, Hollywood had already lost interest in UFOs – or, perhaps more accurately, it had lost touch with American audiences. The 1960s marked the beginning of an economic slump in Tinseltown that would last for nearly two decades, during which time crusty studio executives consistently failed to recognise the dollar-potential of America's huge, and largely uncatered-for, youth market. Little did the bigwigs suspect that the public's enduring fascination with all things extraterrestrial would eventually play a major role in their industry's economic revival (more on this later). By the decade's end, it truly appeared as

LEFT: The old-fashioned approach of *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* seemed out of step with the times.

though Hollywood's aliens had packed their bags and left town for good.

In 1971, though, they made a notable return to the big screen, albeit in microbial form. Adapted from Michael Crichton's novel, *The Andromeda Strain*'s plot relied upon methodical procedure and clinical detail as opposed to more traditional, action-based thrills to engage its audiences; and its portrayal of an uncontrollable extraterrestrial virus was inspired by serious scientific debate of the time. It had been two years since Neil Armstrong had taken his giant leap for mankind, and the Apollo programme was now well under way. But within this new astronomical context, genuine public fears existed concerning the possibility of an ET virus accidentally finding its way to Earth via a lunar module. *The Andromeda Strain* tapped these fears to great effect, and the film proved a big draw for terrified Americans everywhere.

Meanwhile, on the political front, 1974 saw the resignation of disgraced President Richard Nixon, and, with US troops still fighting a losing war in Vietnam, the American Dream seemed to be fading fast. Gone was the people's faith in government, gone was their sense of righteousness; gone, too, were UFOs – at least according to the Air Force. With the closure of Project Blue Book in 1969, the USAF had finally been able to announce an end to an enigma that, for some 20 years, had baffled America and the world. By publicly washing its hands of the UFO issue, the US government had effectively ended its official accountability on all matters pertaining to unexplained aerial intrusions, and the subject was now dead. Except that it wasn't...

Despite the absence of any notable alien-themed films to spark their imaginations, Americans continued to report UFOs throughout the early 1970s; and



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the seemingly UFO-related phenomenon of "animal mutilations" became widespread across much of the American West. Over in Hollywood, studio scribes were slow to catch on, and it wasn't until 1978, with Philip Kaufman's remake of the paranoid classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, that the American people's inherent fear of aliens was exploited anew. Interestingly, though, Kaufman's downbeat movie seemed less concerned with alien invasion, and more with the shattered dreams of a generation and the sad, inevitable compromising of its hippie ideals. Here was a film about social isolation, its protagonists practically pod-people even before the arrival of the alien spores. Unmistakably, it was a product of its time.

Kaufman's film was followed,

Hollywood had already lost interest in UFOs

just one year later, by Ridley Scott's science fiction-horror masterpiece, *Alien*. Thanks to conceptual artist HR Giger's twisted creature design, the razor-toothed xenomorph of the film's title remains, to this day, the most terrifying extraterrestrial in the history of the Silver Screen, and the movie's iconic tagline has lost none of its primal power: 'In space, no one can hear you scream.'

These two films served to remind Americans that aliens – though not as brazen in their invasive intent as during the 1950s – were still out there, and were just as mean as ever. But any additional damage these movies may have done to the extraterrestrial image was mitigated in advance by the release of a film in 1977 that had finally broken Hollywood's "hostile alien" mould. The mould wasn't so much broken, in fact, as shattered.

Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (opposite, top) was a miracle of a movie. It imparted a message of universal hope, and revealed to

LEFT: Ridley Scott's *Alien* reached new heights of extraterrestrial terror.

BELOW: *The Andromeda Strain* tapped into real fears of an ET virus.

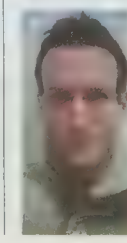
the world, finally, that aliens were not a force to be feared. According to Spielberg's vision, aliens were simply misunderstood; not our malevolent destroyers, but our gloriously benevolent friends (he told his cast during filming that the movie was to be "very gentle, like an embrace"). It was the work of an unashamed idealist, and its director's childlike sense of wonder infused its every frame.

To the surprise of many, Spielberg's joy proved to be infectious. *Close Encounters* became part of the zeitgeist, and its searing imagery and unforgettable five-tone motif helped make it one of the most successful films of its era. It was so successful, in fact, that it played a key role in Hollywood's late 1970s economic revival. Along with two other alien-themed hits of the time – *Star Wars* (1977), and *Superman* (1978) – *Close Encounters* was pure cinematic adrenalin, shot straight into the heart of a dying industry.

Spielberg's film also reignited public curiosity about UFOs as an enduring enigma, and its release closely coincided with the 30th anniversary of the 'crash' at Roswell. Just one year later, Jesse Marcel would spill the beans on his firsthand experiences of that event, opening the floodgates for hundreds more closely-corresponding Roswell testimonies; the rest, as they say, is history.

It had taken them the better part of 30 years, but Hollywood's aliens had finally made the transition from hostile invaders to saviours. Remarkably, this transition was not gradual, but immediate; and was affected almost single-handedly by a wunderkind director with a vision. *Close Encounters* came as a reassuring hug towards the end of a difficult decade for America, and for the next few years at least it would redefine Hollywood's "working relationship" with aliens. The 1980s would be a time of extraterrestrial kinship and splendour, when UFOs would return to Hollywood en masse – this time, in peace. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROBBIE GRAHAM is a New York Film Academy graduate, a college lecturer in Film and Media, and is now tutoring at the University of Bristol.

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Fort letter rediscovered

IAN JAMES KIDD uncovers a long-unseen letter from Charles Fort on the subject of mysterious falls from the sky.



IAN JAMES KIDD is a doctoral postgraduate at Durham University. He is working on a book on the philosophy of Charles Fort.

Notes and Queries No.148

(June 20, 1925), p.442

FALL OF LARVAE AFTER A STORM.—

Occasionally, in the past, there have been, in the columns of 'N. & Q.,' discussions of falls of living things from the sky: but there is a variation of this subject, which never has been discussed anywhere, according to my searches; and that is reported falls from the sky of creatures unknown to naturalists of this earth. If anything of the kind could be accepted, the implications might be revolutionary. I have about a dozen records of falls of large larvae from the sky, at times that were unseasonable for larvae in places so visited.

In the *Cornish Echo*, Feb. 27, 1903, it is said that, upon the morning of the 26th, after a thunderstorm, worms were found strewn along the streets of Falmouth. The largest were two inches long. There were white rings around them, and in form they were not unlike angle worms – 'not tapering off like ordinary earthworms.' It is said that the creatures had not come up from the ground, because, though some were alive, many that were dead were strewn along pavements. It may be that readers can recognise, from the description, some form of life that is indigenous to Cornwall. But the mystery is double. If there be such worms, or larvae, in England, would they not be hibernating and secure from seizure by a whirlwind in the month of February?

CHARLES FORT
39, Marchmont Street, London. W.C.

Many critics have complained that Charles Fort was a merely passive researcher, a man content to spend the days thumbing through scientific journals without ever bothering to verify

the reports he took notes upon. This lazy criticism is easily rebutted by the fact that Fort engaged in a widespread correspondence with periodicals and witnesses, in order to verify the data he used. While not a field investigator, he did not simply take his data at face value, but sought to verify it wherever possible.

In recent years (see FT175:56–7 and 200:56–7), some of these letters from Fort to British and American newspapers have been found, in which he presents data upon anomalous phenomena and offers his own theories concerning them. The letter reprinted here, from the literary and philosophical journal *Notes and Queries*, is the first known article to a scholarly publication. I hope that other letters remain waiting to be discovered.

This letter pursued the phenomenon of falls from the sky of living creatures – in this case larvae and snakes – and pointed to certain problems with conventional explanations. It is a fortan cliché that whenever fish or frogs rain from the sky, a local meteorologist will always 'explain' that a whirlwind or waterspout had deposited them. This explanation is undoubtedly often the case, but Fort demonstrates in his books and letters that it is often inadequate. In some cases, like that of the fall of worms in Cornwall, the species are out of season, non-native or simply unidentifiable; in this case they cannot have been transported from some lake in the vicinity.

Fort's preferred explanation for these anomalous falls had been offered in a letter the previous year, to the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (27 July 1924). He argued that falls of lizards, snakes and frogs from the sky were "migrations from unknown worlds not far away". In *New Lands* (1923), Fort

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argued for the existence of worlds near to our own from which creatures and matter sometimes fell. Opposition to this theory, he complained in *Book of the Damned* (1919), is motivated by "conformity with a general attempt to hold out for the isolation of this earth" amongst the scientific community (p15). Fort contradicted this dogma, interpreting data upon "profound darkness, fall of matter from the sky, lights in the sky, and earthquakes" as "phenomena of the near approach of other worlds to this world" (p221).

This theme is revived in the *Notes and Queries* letter. Fort carefully proposes that if one accepts that certain creatures which fall from the sky are of non-terrestrial origin, "the implications might be revolutionary".

This would prove not only the existence of 'new lands' but also of the transportation of materials between them. The phenomenon of successive and repeating falls even suggested regular communications between worlds. Unfortunately, conformity with the dogma of Earth's isolation is still going strong. Fort once quoted the editor of the *Zoologist* as saying that he was "continually receiving" accounts of rains "not only of frogs, but toads, white

fish and eels". Yet, as Fort points out, "in all the volumes of the *Zoologist*, I can find only two reports of such falls" and he concludes "that hosts of data have been lost because orthodoxy does not look favourably upon such reports" (p79).

Fort's theory that falls of creatures and matter from the sky were side-effects of the passage of planetary objects near to our own world might today seem absurd, but given the problems with the conventional "whirlwind" explanation, there is surely a place for such alternative explanations, however odd or eccentric they might seem.

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References to Fort are to the John Brown editions of *The Book of the Damned* and *New Lands*. The letters to the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* and *T.P.'s Weekly* are available at www.resologist.net. The letter is available as a PDF file at www.dur.ac.uk/i.j.kidd/fort.htm.



The Sea Giantess of Ireland

We recently published an account of a giantess washed up on the shores of mediæval Korea. Now, **SIMON YOUNG** unearths a strikingly similar case from 10th-century Ireland and wonders just what these early beachcombers might have found...



SIMON YOUNG specialises in the history of the Dark Ages and Celtic folklore, and is the co-author of *Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend* (1995) and author of *Britannia: Caminos Novos* (2001).

Marinus van der Sluijs has been kind enough to inform us (FT223:56-7) that in AD 661 (or perhaps AD 667) the Korean *Samguk Yusa* records: "The body of a huge woman came floating on the sea south of Sabi-su. Her body was 73ft long, her feet 6ft long, and her mount of Venus 3ft long. Another story says her body was 18ft long." The first reaction of any sane reader to this would reasonably be: "Yeah, right", especially when he or she learns from the same article that the *Samguk Yusa* also included giant kings, pets falling from the sky and dogs jumping live out of murals. The Korean Giantess was presumably an incarnation of a goddess of the sea. Legend here has become hopelessly muddled with fact and historicised. It is a process that can be found in cultures all around the world. It happens.

However, a record from the other side of the world – from Ireland, to be precise – might make us think twice about the Korean Sea Goddess. In AD 906, almost 150 years after Korea received its bounty from the ocean, we learn in the *Annals of Innisfallen* that: "A woman was washed up on the shore of Alba in this year. Her length was two and 10 added to 20 times eight [i.e. 192] ft, her plaits were 16ft long, her fingers were 6ft, her nose 6ft and her body was as white as a swan or the foam of the wave."¹ 'Alba' is a word that shifts meaning in Ireland (and in Irish) with the centuries: sometimes it can mean Britain, sometimes north Britain (modern Scotland). Here it is probably referring to the latter. Most probably, then, the giantess came to shore on the coast of Scotland, the west of which was very much part of the Gaelic world at this date.

Let us first of all get the obvious out of the way. Ireland and Korea did not

have diplomatic relations in the early Middle Ages. There was some fleeting contact between Asia and Europe in Roman times, associated above all with the silk trade with China, and the Romans also made their way to India (and north-east Africa) looking for spices. But by the seventh century, and then onwards for three or four centuries, Europe was closed off from most of the rest of the world – a Christian ghetto locked in by the early success of Islam. True, folktales and folktale-motifs travel with surprising rapidity – we have elements in Irish legends, especially those to do with sea-adventures, that can be paralleled with legends from Arabia. But there is no reference to giant women floating in from the ocean anywhere else in Irish lore: the closest we come are giants living on islands in the ocean.

So, how on Earth do we start to explain this correspondence?

The first question must surely concern the reliability of the *Annals of Innisfallen*. Now, the *Annals of Innisfallen* are one of several members of the Irish annalistic family that include the *Annals of Ulster*, (confusingly) the *Annals of Wales*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the *Annals of Tigernach*, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and the *Chronicon Scottorum*. Unfortunately, any attempt at understanding the difficult relationship between these different chronicles is marginally less enjoyable than suicide. For our purposes, it is enough to note that these later mediæval collections contain material recorded by contemporaries, dating back as far as the early sixth century, and that they also include invented material. It should be noted, too, that one way to test the antiquity of an individual entry is to note in how many of these different chronicles it has been included: if the entry is included in several with similar details, we may be able to prove its presence in a now lost ancestor of the surviving collections.

Here, the giantess scores well – but not brilliantly. She also appears in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the *Annals*

of *Ulster* (as a late addition) and the *Chronicon Scottorum* – that might mean that she also appeared in an early text, perhaps even one written in 906, though she may have been passed around from a late source simply because the entry in question was so interesting. The details are stable in all the annals, though the numbers sometimes drop or add a few feet – as is typical when Roman numerals are involved. There is also some confusion about the year. The *Annals of Ulster* date her arrival to 891 and is followed in this by the *Annals of the Four Masters*.

The Irish annals traditionally notice deaths, fires, bad crops and other 'happenings' – so in 906 the *Annals of Innisfallen* put the floating giantess next to the record of the passing away of a king. However, the Irish annals also have their fair share of weird or bizarre entries, as do the Koreans and indeed most chronicling traditions. So we have the woman who munches on her husband's testicles, locust storms in Britain, dragons, flying ships, not to mention walk-on parts for fairies. And these 'weird entries' can very broadly be split into two types: the eyewitness variety and what we might call the *Sunday Sport* variety.

The eyewitness type entries include references to things that have been seen: especially interesting here are the many mentions of happenings in the sky, spotted by star-gazing monks in the monasteries where the annals were written.² So, to take an almost random example, in 991 the sky was seen to be blood red on St Stephen's night – an event interesting to the early Christian because Stephen as proto-martyr would be easily associated with blood. Then there are the *Sunday Sport* entries, stories that are so fantastic that we can write them off. For example, the wilder entries found in the *Annals of the Four Masters* at the end of the Irish tradition including annals that are mythological in origin or from Christian legend – Irish gods arriving in Eire or hermits walking barefoot across the Irish Sea.

The problem is, of course, telling the contemporary eyewitness accounts from



A RICHARD ALLEN

the outrageous additions put together at a later date. What, for example, about the dragons in the Irish Annals in 735? A natural first instinct is to put them down to mythology as well. But scholars have shown that the 'dragons' were most likely a strong Aurora Borealis – in other words, they were seen. Then there are other entries that are apparently based on observation but become more troubling the more you think about them. For example, did this storm recorded in 961 really ever happen? "An arrow-like flash came right through Leinster from the south-west and killed eleven hundred men and animals as far as Áth Cliath." The mind boggles...

From all this, it should be clear that the giantess entry *could* be a contemporary or near-contemporary annal. It should also be clear that the Irish annals had a real interest in the strange: and sometimes this interest is based on contemporary observation as opposed to later invention. There is no *de facto* reason, then, for getting rid of our giantess if we can find some way to explain her. But how to possibly explain huge women washing up on the shores of Korea and Britain?

One explanation is given by van der Sluijs talking of the Korean giantess: "could it have been the heavily decomposed corpse of a giant squid or some other mollusc that had really washed ashore?"

Before answering this, it is worth looking again at the descriptions

The problem is telling witness accounts from later additions

of the two giantesses. The Korean giantess has feet (and legs?), a body and, winningly, a mount of Venus. The Scottish giantess reported in Ireland has fingers (and arms?), plaits and a nose and was white – though perhaps rotting-blubber white as opposed to the swan-white of the *Annals of Innisfallen*. It is fairly easy to assimilate this to a mollusc's anatomy. The plaits could be tentacles: though quite how one explains fingers (and presumably arms) together with plaits is a nice question. The nose or mount of Venus might be part of the mantle or, perhaps, the beak?

But then we must also acknowledge that there are problems with this explanation. One is the length of our titans. At 73ft (22m), the Korean giantess would tip over the normal measurements for a giant squid – though note "[a]nother story says her body was 18ft [5.5m]". The Scottish giantess is reported to be an impossible 192ft (59m), three times the size of a huge giant squid. Even allowing for the

natural license of fishermen, these are discrepancies that should worry us.

But, for this author, far more worrying is the fact that these decomposed hulks appeared as women to both Gaelic and Korean passers-by on the beach. Before accepting that they were squid, I would like to see a rough sketch of a squid's body (decomposed, bloated or otherwise) that could take on or be imagined to take on the female form. In the meantime, is it possible that we have another animal here: a very decayed blue whale maybe, albino or otherwise? Or perhaps there are other annals from Ethiopia, from France, from Palestine recording a similar 'event', and they appeared in Ireland and Korea as part of a folklore craze, an early urban legend? What should be clear is that these two records in two parts of the world that were not in contact, but that are strikingly similar, require an explanation. Perhaps a reader of *FT* will oblige. ³

NOTES

¹ "Banscal darala h-i trácht n-Alban isin bliadain so, da thraig déc ar .ix. fichtib a fot length; a .xul. fot a trise length; .ul. traigid fot mér a láme length; a .ul. fot a sróne length; glidir géis l' huan tuinne a corp."

² For anyone interested in this astronomical material an exceptional article was published a decade ago by Daniel McCarthy and Aidan Breen McCarthy, "Astronomical Observations in the Irish Annals and their Motivation" in the Irish journal *Peritia* 11 (1997) pp 1-43. One of the most interesting aspects of this article was that it proved that Irish monks systematically watched the night skies.

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This month's books, films and games

reviews



Elves: big, but a tad touchy...

And if you think those archaic elvish women were a terrifying bunch, meet the chaps – gorgeous, gender-bending, sexually ambiguous practitioners of a shameful magic



Elves in Anglo-Saxon England

Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity

Alaric Hall

Boydell & Brewer
 Hb, 226pp, approx. bib to die for, ind, £45.
 ISBN 1843832941

PORTFOLIO BOOKS PRICE £45.00

"Wonderful folk, Elves, sir! Wonderful!", as Sam Gamgee put it after his first encounter. Tolkien was a bit of an enthusiast on the subject himself; but for the master elf-lore was only a recreation from his day job as an Old English philologist. Not so Alaric Hall.

Here is a man whose studies have been devoted to the language of Anglo-Saxon elfdom, with a linguistic precision which non-specialists can only envy. After all, you can't excavate an elf. You can only pick away the layers of meaning that have accumulated around that tricky name over the last 15 centuries.

"They are quite different from what I expected," Sam goes on, and readers of this book will find much to surprise them. Elves, it seems were not little people, they weren't invisible, they didn't fly. If you met an Old English *ælf* or a Scandinavian *álfr*, he would look like an aristocratic male,

as splendid as one of the *vanir*, who intermarry with the gods in Eddaic mythology. They were mighty fighters: "elf of battle" was a poet's compliment, and Alfred, 'elf-wisdom', was a fitting name for a king.

Can these be the same elves which the *Beowulf*-poet dismisses as Cain's kin, and that the early exorcists drove out as demons? Have we lost an original, pagan sense of the supernatural – or was there ever such a thing as "the supernatural" in Anglo-Saxon culture at all?

Only by studying language in detail can we get at what the vanished generations thought, and Hall is a master at the analysis of language. He suggests that, instead of perceiving Reality and the Other, the early English thought in terms of three worlds: those of humans, gods and monsters.

The god-world, to which elves belonged, would always make common league with our own against the monsters that threaten the order of things. Indeed, some human beings, such as magicians and that queer race the Finns, are half-elfen themselves. But though gods and elves are, in some sense, on our side, they are as touchy and violent as men, and may threaten or kill individuals to avenge a slight.

This is where the elf-charms come in. Old English lore was rich in protective formulae for when elves turned bad, including the superb psychodrama *Wid færstice*. Anachronistic readings of these charms have assumed that Anglo-Saxon elves caused illness by shooting little arrows, like those in modern folklore, but Hall shows that it's more subtle than that. Shooting in the charms

"Many a hero, like Weland, 'leader of elves', may have been a fairy in more senses than one"

is an enacted metaphor, not a literalist supernatural aetiology; the cunning man/doctor uses it to act out a cure for a stabbing pain. The same medicine books consistently associate elves with fevers and madness, and this ties in with the Middle English idea that the elvish is imaginary or delusory. Delusions, in this world-view, are not the outcome of your own mental state, but things that are put in your head by outside agents.

But what if these visions were not delusions after all?

Siden, the illness which the medical texts blame on elves, is Scandinavian *seidr*, a magical technique which has aroused renewed interest in practitioners of the Northern Tradition, and which has always been associated with the elf-like *vanir*.

Religion and ecstasy are close cousins. The word *gydig* meant god-inspired before it turned, more prosaically, into our 'giddy'; and there is a parallel word *ylfig*, which must have meant elf-inspired, though it came to mean 'propheying in fits'. For the saints and rulers who wrote our Anglo-Saxon texts, this was mere madness, but it is possible that others might have gone beyond insanity in search of knowledge – at a price. *Seidr* had squalid associations, being linked with despised forms of male homosexuality.

So the archaic elves were beautiful, uncanny, gender-bending practitioners of a shameful magic – a bit like David Bowie.

Many a hero of legend, like Weland, "leader of elves", may have been a fairy in more senses than one. If so, they had opposite numbers in the manly females of myth, the frightful harridan woman-warriors who loom large in charms such as *Wid færstice*, and who have left their trace in the angry fairy queens of later lore.

And yet in the beginning, there were no female elves. Hall deploys some densely technical arguments here – if you can't keep up with the textual analysis of gloss and lemma, there's a lot you'll have to take on trust – but his conclusion is a simple one. Eighth-century clerics were baffled by the nymphs they read about in classical texts. Who were these lovely supernatural women? Otherworldly hags, yes, they were familiar. Fierce, graceful, haunting youths, they were a possibility. But to imagine a beautiful, noble, woman from the realm of *Færie* was a revolutionary step. It would be many years before Galadriel took her place in the imaginary yearnings of the heart. And this tells us much about gender relations then and now, about the slow transformation of the heroic Northern world into the courtly culture of feudal Europe that is both scene and author of our fairytales.

It's amazing what you can get out of a monosyllable. Alaric Hall has done a sterling job with elves. **Jeremy Harte**

Fortean Times Verdict
 FINE EXCAVATION OF THE MEANING OF ANGLO-SAXON ELFDOM

9

A little light reading

A weighty (OK, back-breaking) encyclopædia of all things esoteric wins hands-down over secret society juvenilia



The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Hidden History

The Ultimate A-Z of Ancient Mysteries, Lost Civilisations and Forgotten Wisdom

John Michael Greer

HarperElement
Hb, 694pp, bib, ind, £20, ISBN 0007220685

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

How To Start Your Own Secret Society

Nick Harding

Oldcastle
Pb, 192pp, £6.99, ISBN 1904048846

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.99

The main problem with the *Element Encyclopedia of Secret Societies* is not its content but its format. The damn thing isn't even a house-brick; it's a breeze-block. Presumably to make them look impressive, HarperElement have chosen to do all their esoteric encyclopædias in a 10in x 8in (25.2cm x 20.5cm) format, making this book incredibly awkward to hold while reading; and at 694 pages it weighs a ton – actually, 4¼ lb (1.93kg), twice the weight of most hardback books. It doesn't need to be that size or to have that many pages. The whole point of having two columns on a page as this has (so that it looks more like an encyclopædia) is to squeeze

more words on the page; but this has fewer than 500 words on its fullest page, which is actually less than most normal hardback books do in their one column! And each new letter of the alphabet has an introductory single-letter page with a blank reverse, and sometimes a blank preceding page as well: that alone is 62 wasted pages. Trees died unnecessarily for this cumbersome volume.

But the content, with some caveats, is excellent. John Michael Greer is a high-grade Freemason; a senior member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids; and Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America. He knows his stuff. He's not taken in by all the false histories and spurious claims of esoteric orders, and he seems to have a commonsense approach to the hidden mysteries of inner wisdom.

Inevitably, such a huge work by one person will have some errors, but the carelessness of some of the mistakes in this encyclopædia is a little worrying for its credibility. Greer calls Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh (*The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*) "British authors" in one place and "English authors" in another; in fact, Baigent is from New Zealand and Leigh is American. He spells Westmorland with an extra "e". He's completely incorrect on where the first Solar Temple deaths occurred. Aleister Crowley's wife Rose was the sister of an artist, not the daughter. He says that Christian Fundamentalism was "invented" in the 1820s by Plymouth Brethren founder John Nelson Darby, who actually "invented" Dispensationalism, not the same thing at all. Irritatingly, he refers to the "Knights Templars" rather than the "Knights Templar" throughout.

Other problems might be more cultural in origin. For example, speaking of Margaret Murray's long-discredited *Witch Cult in Western Europe* about the hidden

continuation of a pagan fertility cult in Europe, Greer says: "Many people in the Wiccan and neo-pagan movements still treat the Murray hypothesis as an article of faith, and dismiss scholarly challenges to it as simply another round of persecution directed at their supposedly ancient beliefs." Perhaps they do in the States, but certainly not in Britain, where most Pagans are well-read, appreciate the academic interest in their religion, and are well aware of the true nature of their "traditional" foundation myths.

Despite these problems, and the lack of illustrations, this encyclopædia is impressive for the breadth of Greer's knowledge of all things esoteric: Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, the Ordo Templi Orientis, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and all their sisters and their cousins and their aunts. The interrelationships between all the many organisations, whether real or imagined, are endlessly fascinating, and you can spend hours following the cross-references in this book.

In contrast, *How to Start Your Own Secret Society* is simply a mess. It can't make up its mind whether it wants to be a spoof or a serious guide. The problem is, the serious bits are hugely repetitive, and display the author's unexamined assumptions and prejudices, while the supposedly humorous bits aren't in the slightest bit funny. Quoting his own made-up 18th- and 19th-century accounts of secret societies featuring people with names like William Eggy-Belch is Fourth-Form humour, and not even very good Fourth-Form humour.

Don't waste your money.
David V Barrett

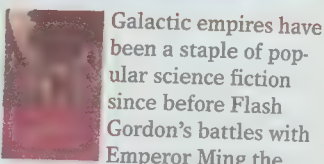
Fortean Times Verdict
ELEMENT: DECENT (IF HEFTY), BUT MARKED BY CARELESS ERRORS
HOW TO: POINTLESS AND UNFUNNY
6 2

Science Fiction and Empire

Patricia Kerslake

Liverpool University Press
Hb, 224pp, £50, ISBN 9781846310249

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £50.00



Galactic empires have been a staple of popular science fiction since before Flash Gordon's battles with Emperor Ming the Merciless in 1934. Patricia Kerslake's *Science Fiction and Empire* "explores experiments in the practice of power and empire in SF as it connects the imperial past with the potential neo-empires of the future."

What counts as an empire in SF is a key issue, but this is fudged. Is any organisation that spans more than one planet necessarily an empire? Does landing on the Moon count as imperialism? Or setting up a colony on an uninhabited Mars? Kerslake also freely uses terms like postcolonial – I'm not sure what that means even after having looked it up. Or what a neo-empire is.

SF is a huge field, and with limited space Kerslake has to be very selective which works she looks at in detail. However, there are some surprising choices: *Star Wars*, whose 'Evil Empire' made such an impact on President Reagan, is glossed over, as is *Star Trek*, whose Federation goodies and Klingon Empire baddies might have made it an obvious entry. And Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream...* seems like a curious inclusion, which Kerslake justifies on the basis that the robotic replicants are the slave underclass of an imperial society.

Kerslake gives most space to a discussion of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy. I suspect the colonisation of a remote desert by a small band of adventurous people is of particular interest as the author lectures at Central Queensland University. The story of a distant outpost growing until it one day rivals the motherland may have special appeal in the Antipodes.

Kerslake's starting point is the concept of 'the Other', derived from Edward Said's work on orientalism. This boils down to

defining some people as being Us (say, white Christian Britons) and the rest as Others ("blasted foreigners"), who are marginalised, excluded and generally looked down upon.

If one accepts that all men are essentially equal, then classing someone as 'Other' is a straightforward act of prejudice. But in SF, the Other is not necessarily human and may genuinely be inhuman, unhuman or subhuman. Treating people as machinery is wrong, but in SF the Other may really be nothing but circuits, like Dick's human-like but soulless androids. Or the Other may be alien, with a complex moral status. Some aliens may equate easily enough with humans, but others will not. Are the man-eating Xenomorphs in the *Alien* series animals, or people, or something in between?

HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* is one of the works discussed; Wells's Martians are certainly the Other writ large. Kerslake does not mention that the grotesque, machine-bound Martians were intended as a parody. Wells was a zoologist, and one species casually killing another was not necessarily a moral issue. He repeatedly compares the Martian attitude to humans with humans' attitude to ants – not so much imperialism as pest control.

It's questionable how much one should read into empires in SF. Much of the time, they simply provide convenient and slightly exotic villains, like Ming the Merciless and the Klingons. In other cases, the struggle against an imperial power is a more-or-less exact replica of the American War of Independence, as in Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, one of the books Kerslake discusses. Heinlein also provides plenty of examples of humans setting out to colonise the final frontier in a straight copy of the American Western tradition. The "wagon train to the stars" approach has brave colonists dealing with various hazards including the occasional bloodthirsty Injun – sorry, alien.

Such recapitulations of the past are a handy way for SF to engage the reader: as a genre, it needs to combine the imaginative and exciting with something

familiar that the reader can easily grasp. Similarly, plundering history for backgrounds is a convenient way of filling in blanks and doesn't necessarily provide a great deal of insight. I cannot see that the large number of empires in SF means that "Empire is dormant within numerous, though not all, human actions", as Kerslake asserts.

I have to admit to being irritated by Kerslake's lengthy digression on the physical problems of running an interplanetary empire, given speed-of-light limitations. Dealing with the impossible challenges of interstellar travel is bread and butter for SF writers, and Kerslake's comments don't even go as far as speculation about wormholes, never mind more *outré* speculation. (And even given such a limitation, effective central control is far from impossible, especially with the resources of an SF writer's imagination to draw upon...) Perhaps this section best illustrates the difference between Kerslake's liberal arts approach and the scientific kernel of real SF.

Because SF is not really about thought experiments with novel social structures: it's a way of telling tall tales with a free imagination fired by scientific advances. One SF writer's tale doesn't necessarily tell you much even about their own politics, still less their society's politics and hardly anything at all about probable futures, as any look at old SF will show.

I liked this book because it made me think about the issues involved and because it made me want to reread some books and read others for the first time. But it could have used a much lighter touch – Kerslake does tend to take it all very seriously – and more sympathy with the genre as a whole.

Are there hints of an imperial future in SF? It's hard to see, and harder to argue; the social sciences don't seem able to agree whether we have an imperial power in the present United States. And as for the future – it might be an empire, Jim, but not as we know it.

David Hambling

Fortean Times Verdict
DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF INTERPLANETARY DOMINATION?
5

Shazzam!

Magic's a slippery notion, as this study of magic, machines and modernity shows



Technologies of Magic

A Cultural Study of Ghosts, Machines and the Uncanny

Eds: John Potts & Edward Scheer

Power Publications
Pb, 163pp, illus, refs, ind, AU \$39.94/£18.50, ISBN 9780909952358

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.50

Examining the relationship between technology and magic is potentially stimulating, and there is much of interest in this volume. Unfortunately, in general the essays in it read like a compilation put together after a conference, with the editors' introduction suggesting a consistency that doesn't seem apparent when struggling through the academic prose of the majority of them. The most significant factor uniting them seems to be that all the authors, bar one, work in Australia, mostly Sydney.

Ten papers are grouped into three parts ('The Persistence of Magic in Modernity'; 'Ghosts and Their Machines'; and 'New Technologies and Their Doubles'), headings that are suitably vague to accommodate the disparate contributions.

The editors begin their introduction with the question: "Why is it that many technologies, particularly media technologies, continue to be shrouded in a mystique, preserving forms of magical belief within rationally ordered societies?" and this abstract premise sets the tone for what follows.

The notion of 'magic' is a slippery one and can encourage waffle when it is not pinned down sufficiently, a common fault on display here.

Among the best efforts are Scott McQuire on 19th-century electrification and how it tapped into feelings of modernity, in particular how the environment was perceived in a new light (literally), while generating more primal sensations of awe; and co-editor John Potts on ghosts as "an idea that does cultural work", by which he means the ways in which the idea of the ghost satisfies social needs.

Other essays examine stage magic and how it betrays 19th-century preoccupations with transformations and with the ways in which space was used and time perceived; magic as performance, with practical effects that meld technology and magic; invocation, using an occult term in a technological context, showing how this "call to power" transcends domains and still has relevance in secular as well as religious situations; and "new ethnography", emphasising contingency, in the sense of hidden and multiple causes, in looking at different cultures.

Also with an ethnographic feel is a look at the ways in which conventional science can struggle with phenomena that fall outside its narrow range, using a ghost encounter as a case study.

The final piece looks at Stelarc, an Australian performance artist who combines technology and ritual in ever-more elaborate choreography. Here is someone prepared to explore the implications of our technological future and push at the boundaries of what it is to be human.

Tom Ruffles

Fortean Times Verdict
AMBIOUS ATTEMPT TO LOOK AT THE TECHNOLOGY/MAGIC NEXUS
6

Out of time

Playful cryptozoological art is enough to make one reviewer a wee bit envious...



Cryptozoology Out of Time Place Scale

Raecheil Smith, Mark Bessire & Loren Coleman

JRP/Ringier
Pb, 168pp, illus, notes, £25.00, ISBN 9783905770070
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £25.00

I take my hat off to Mark Bessire. Ever since I curated *Of Monsters and Miracles* at the Croydon Clocktower in 1995, I've been trying to find a museum or gallery with the will (and budget) to do a follow-up exhibition of fortean art.

Mark Bessire, on the other hand, has pulled it off, with much assistance from FT stalwarts Loren Coleman and Jeffrey Vallance. He created a superbly playful and entertaining cryptozoological art exhibition at the Bates College Museum of Art in Maine last year, and this is the catalogue.

It is clear that it was a cracking show. What is unclear is *who* did *what*, as all the picture captions appear on page 158. This is definitely an *art* book, but despite high production values, the catalogue has a fanzine *bricolage* feel to it. This is no bad thing (its 'hand-stamped' page numbers and Courier-like typefaces remind me of the mags I cranked out on Banda copiers nearly 30 years ago), but some of its artistic conceits, like the caption placement, overwhelm its function as a catalogue. Style-mag design tropes – such as pink text on orange backgrounds – are hard on the eyes, and rough (though high quality) matte paper is not entirely

friendly to photo reproduction. However, I quibble; it is an excellent volume.

In addition to interesting essays from the likes of Coleman, there are entertaining artworks from an eclectic array of sources, from Rosamund Purcell's evocative photos of the conjoined twin skeleton and other specimens to a slightly (well, very) barny horned dog created by the deliciously-entitled Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists. There are also Walmor Correa's eerie anatomical drawings of dissected mermaids and Mark Dion's *Hall of Cryptozoology*, a mock-up corridor of the Charles Fort Institute of our dreams, with doors labelled 'Bureau for the Investigation of Paranormal Phenomena', 'Federal Wildlife Commission Department of Cryptozoology' and so on, amazing crypto-ephemera from Loren Coleman's collection and much more. The catalogue does a good job of capturing the crazy magic of fortean phenomena in a way straight reporting and analysis never will, and provides an imaginative window into our world for people who might not have given cryptozoology a second thought or dismissed it as tabloid junk.

There are those who see attempts to explore fortean ideas through artistic lenses, or to place them in a cultural context, as a waste of time (*vide* the incomprehension that greeted Stewart Home and The Association of Autonomous Astronauts at one UnConvention, and periodic cries that FT should just be about investigating mysteries). This catalogue makes it clear that exploring fortean culture from other directions is a fascinating and fruitful exercise.

Here's hoping I find a UK gallery soon!
Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
GORGEOUS MATERIAL... IF YOU CAN IGNORE THE DESIGN TICS **8**

Murder City The Bloody History of Chicago in the Twenties

Michael Lesy

WW Norton & Co
Pb, 320pp, £15.99, ISBN 9780393060300
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



This is a strange book in a number of ways. On the surface, it simply recounts the stories behind 20 or so murders in 1920s Chicago. All were different, making it a kind of murder smörgåsbord, but they all generated an inordinate amount of media coverage. Lesy gives us the facts, the background, the motives and to an extent an insight into the mind of the killers and their victims. A lot of court testimony and archive material is quoted, and for this alone it's an interesting read.

But there is another – and more fortean – aspect to it. Throughout, there is a strong hint that there was something wrong with Chicago as a place. The suggestion is that the city, its environs and its inhabitants were in some way mentally ill or dysfunctional, and this illness was some kind of psychic poison generated by the city as an independent living entity. It manifested itself from time to time in the form of extreme brutality.

For sure, Chicago in the 1920s was the murder capital of the US, and probably its most corrupt city to boot. The question is: was the oppressive, violent atmosphere generated by the inhabitants, or was it engendered by the city itself, a living, brooding entity? It seems that if you had criminal tendencies, Chicago was a place which would draw them out. Moreover, if you went away to escape the place and the emotions it provoked, then were foolish enough to return, the die was cast. Annoyingly, this theme isn't seriously pursued, and it's an opportunity missed.

A word, too, on the book's staccato 'newstime' style, a sort of Hunter S Thompson meets the soundbite. It's effective once. Then it jars. Try the background of killer

Harvey Church: "His parents lived in Adams, a county seat. Big fish in a little pond. Halfway between Oshkosh and La Crosse. They were country people. Yankee stock. Modest people. Merchant farmers. They were rich."

It makes it read like the script for a late-night documentary series, which perhaps it is, but there are more punctuation marks and techniques available than just the full stop.
Jack Romano

Fortean Times Verdict
A GOOD READ, BUT UNSATISFYING AND THE PROSE IS WEIRD **7**

Mind Bombs

Garrick Alder

Duckworth Overlook
Hb, 160pp, notes, bib, £9.99, ISBN 9780715636602
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99



With a cover saying "Exploding Conventional Wisdom", one feared this was another wacky New Age compilation of dubious factoids. Luckily, the author has been more circumspect in his selection of miscellanea.

Most of the data is of a political nature, with some side-orders of PR, health and science. All of the items are referenced in an unnumbered "notes" section at the rear of the book, but there is no index or sensible order to the information.

Readers of *Fortean Times*, *Lobster*, *Nexus* and *Private Eye* will probably be familiar with many of the snippets in the book. As they are the most likely purchasers, one hopes that copies will be bought as presents for other people. However, as one of the stories explains, people tend to ignore information that is unpleasant (i.e. contradicts previously held beliefs.) Still, the research shows that this ignoring is pleasant in its own right.

So everyone should enjoy this book!
Richard Alexander

Fortean Times Verdict
ONE FOR FORTEANS TO GIVE THE NON-FORTEANS IN THEIR LIVES **7**

Secrets of UFO Technology

Kenneth W Behrendt

Author House
Pb, 182pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781449014444
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.99



Despite the widespread belief that some UFOs represent alien technology, few have devoted much thought to what makes the buggers fly. Behrendt tackles this problem head-on, trying to match witness reports with the possible technology used. There is much about magnetic fields, beams, anti-mass drives and so on. It reads like hard-core SF, and in lieu of a physical UFO to study, much of it is wild speculation. But how 'they' might be getting here is as relevant as any other facet of the 'Extra Terrestrial Hypothesis'.

Behrendt is to be applauded for trying to untangle a conundrum ufology has largely chosen to ignore.
Andy Roberts

Fortean Times Verdict
SPECULATIVE LOOK AT HOW THEY GET HERE FROM THERE **6**

The Artist and the Mathematician

The Story of Nicolas Bourbaki, the Genius Mathematician Who Never Existed

Amir D Aczel

High Stakes Publishing
Hb, 239pp, illus, bib, notes, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781843440345
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.99



Nicolas Bourbaki was influential. He was also unusual, given that he didn't exist. The reality behind the name, and the impact

of 'his' work is the subject of this volume from Amir D Aczel, the maths writer best known for the book on Fermat's Last Theorem that wasn't by Simon Singh.

Bourbaki was the pseudonym of a group of young mathematicians, mostly French, who published a remarkable series of textbooks between the 1930s and 1960s. Their aim was to rebuild mathematics from the ground up,

removing the slack thinking that they saw suffocating teaching in schools. The gestalt identity was intended to avoid possible claims about intellectual property, but also to shield the participants from direct criticism from their academic superiors. Bourbaki was thus somewhere between a secret society and a prank. His first appearance was in a nonsensical paper by D Kosambi published in an academic journal – shades of Alan Sokal's famous anti-postmodernist jape (and, if one follows the logic of some of Sokal's fans, proof that mathematics must be nonsense).

The ever-evolving Bourbaki group had as much fun as you can with maths, preferring anarchic meetings to chalky classrooms. A sense of mischief prevailed: when the editor of *Mathematical Reviews* exposed the pseudonym, he received first an angry letter from 'Bourbaki' datelined 'From my ashram in the Himalayas', and then accusations of being a collective pseudonym himself.

Bourbaki's work, which inspired the 'New Math' in US schools from the 1960s, stripped mathematics back to its basics. It emphasised the general and abstract, taking little interest in practical applications or even numeracy. Aczel argues that this approach paralleled or even inspired contemporary trends in other fields, including structuralist philosophy and anthropology, cubist art and the Oulipo school of literature.

While there's plenty of toothsome intellectual history here, the book is rather less than the sum of its parts. At just over 200 pages, it never could have been a definitive account of the Bourbaki group and their work, but neither does it really satisfy as a popular introduction. The writing is often clumsy, and the explanation of some key theoretical points frustratingly vague. Perhaps ironically for a book about structuralism, it just doesn't hang together, with no strong narrative to tie together its disparate threads.

Tim Chapman

Fortean Times Verdict
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY THAT DOESN'T QUITE HANG TOGETHER **7**

Sqrats & Co

Hog Killing Varmints, El Pestizo and others you wouldn't want to meet on a dark night

Further Cryptozoology

Ronan Coghlan

Xiphos Books
Pb, 224pp, £7.99/\$11.99 US, ISBN 9780954493684
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In *The Book Of The Damned*, Fort wrote about "giants that will walk by... and the bizarre and the grotesque." Coghlan has marshalled his own procession of almost 1,000 damned creatures, ranging from the six-inch long Two Tentacled Creature to the 200-ft long Richibacto sea serpent of 1895. Between these extremes lie huge blobs, carnivorous plants, sea serpents, gargoyles, giant birds, living dinosaurs and enough tentacled beasts to fill an HP Lovecraft novel. Their very names conjure up bizarre images: the Hog Killing Varmint, the Double-Nosed Andean Tiger Hound, the Ninkinanka, the Sqrats (a rat/squirrel hybrid) and El Pestizo, to mention a mere clawful.

Further Cryptozoology contains 50 updated and 900 entirely new entries to add to those in Coghlan's *A Dictionary Of Cryptozoology* (2004) and *Cryptosup* (2005), but its referencing is odd and inconsistent.

There are only three magazine sources (reference #1 for *Animals and Men*, #7 for *Fate*, and #9 for *Fortean Times*). Thus, if a reference is given as #9 it only tells the reader it was an issue of FT between 2004 and 2006. I trust you see the problem, dear reader.

The book sources are more straightforward e.g. reference A7 is for Chad Arment's *Historical Bigfoot* and G12 for Linda Godfrey's *Hunting The American Werewolf*. These titles have now been added

to my wish list at Amazon.

But to find out more about the Malibu Beach Humanoid that grabbed the actress Shelley Winters during WWII, I am stuck. The reference is S11, so the book author's last name starts with S, but the source list jumps from R9 to S20. This is especially puzzling, as the entry is a new, not an updated one, so presumably the full title is not in Coghlan's earlier books either!

The last source section consists of websites. Once again, the source list skips over many referenced numbers e.g. the fascinating sounding Singapore Creature (something like a walking beach ball) is reference 230. All the reader can deduce is that it is a website somewhere! It would have taken only a few more pages to list all sources for the references in this book. If necessary, space could have been gained by chopping a couple of the more whimsical entries.

An enormous amount of effort has clearly gone into compiling the entries for *Further Cryptozoology*. It is unfortunate that Coghlan has not made it easy for the reader to find out further information or to check the original sources.

Coghlan must be given credit for pushing the boundaries of accepted cryptozoology to include all manner of odd humanoids beyond the normally included hairy hominids and lizardmen types. This is sure to be controversial in crypto circles.

Peter Hassall

Fortean Times Verdict
FASCINATING BUT FRUSTRATING **7**

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Hostel II

Dir Eli Roth, US 2007
On UK release from 29 June

Captivity

Dir Roland Joffe, US 2007
On UK release from 22 June

The recent invention of the term 'torture porn' suggests that an exciting new genre of extreme sex and violence movies is flooding multiplexes everywhere, corrupting the young and sending their parents into paroxysms of apoplectic rage. In fact, it is merely another example of the mainstream media managing to generate a story out of very little, and one suspects that many of the most vocal critics haven't even watched the films they condemn, or are at least unable to put them into a genre context. A revival of interest in horror, prompted largely by the industry's realisation that large returns can be made from relatively low budgets, has inspired some very different films which, unsurprisingly, happen to engage in a dialogue with contemporary fears about world events and so share certain motifs. This is not a coherent new model of filmmaking, but a genre responding to the concerns of its public. *Saw*, for example, which kicked off this most recent wave of violent horror, was a smart, tight, suspenseful piece of filmmaking, to which these two movies bear only the most superficial of resemblance.

Eli Roth's *Hostel* movies are, essentially, filmed 'lads' mags',

made for (and by) overgrown adolescents who want to look at pretty girls with their tops off and gruesome stuff. These movies aren't disturbing (unless, of course, you find lads' mags disturbing), they're fun – in fact, *Hostel II* is an exuberant, feel-good movie that doesn't take itself remotely seriously and makes you leave the cinema grinning. It's better looking, better scripted and more engaging than the original, and while the focus is still on three backpackers – this time girls – who are lured to the titular gateway to hell, it really benefits from fleshing out the characters of the guys paying to kill them. Plus, there are some great girl-kicks-arse sequences, perhaps as a response to accusations of misogyny after the first movie (though what such critics seem to have missed is that in both films Roth sets out to undermine, rather than endorse, the image of women as weak exploitable sex objects).

Captivity, meanwhile, is dull and joyless. It caused outrage in the States for posters which appeared to show its star, Elisha Cuthbert, being abducted, abused and killed. Campaigners denounced it as "the most repulsive, horrifying, woman-hating, human-hating thing... ever seen in public"; Joss Whedon (of *Buffy* fame) condemned it as "a literal sign of the collapse of humanity". The film itself is far less entertaining than such vitriol might suggest.

Elisha Cuthbert is a model, a vapid blonde kidnapped, toyed with and tortured by a serial killer. Helmed by Roland Joffe, the movie is preoccupied with voyeurism – TV monitors, chat-show clips, peepholes in walls, photographs – and presumably fancies itself as an insightful comment on the public's intrusive fascination with celebrities' private lives, or on the manner in which the audience is implicated by the act of watching the movie (and by extension by our viewing of images of torture disseminated by the news media and Internet).

But it has nothing new to say, there is little in the way of a plot to pass the time between what are admittedly inventive moments of grimness, and its extreme tedium only lets up towards the end when it segues into the ridiculous and the hilarious. The script and acting are risible, and the attempt to package the film as a psychological thriller is undermined by the flatness of the characters and the obvious twist ending (*Saw* this ain't). Even the claustrophobia, which should work in the film's favour, merely accentuates the monotony.

If this really is what the collapse of humanity looks like, it clearly wasn't worth hanging around for.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
ALL THIS SEX AND VIOLENCE AND...
SHOULD BE A REMARKABLE FILM...
WHICH TELL US NOTHING NEW

Kaw

Dir Sheldon Wilson, US 2007
Starz Home Entertainment £16.99

In the world of crap horror films about the natural world (*Strays*, *Frogs*, *Rattlers*, *Rottweiler* etc, etc) there can be hardly a creature left that bargain-basement film-makers haven't employed in increasingly vain attempts to scare us.

Not content with simply joining such exalted ranks, Sheldon Wilson's *Kaw* also gives us one of the worst names for a horror movie in recent memory (although I suppose *Cuckoo*, *Pee-wit* or *Twit-Twoo* would have been even less effective). As you've probably guessed, this one is about birds gone bad – ravens, to be precise.

It would be silly to attempt such a movie without at least acknowledging the daddy of this minuscule sub-genre, Hitchcock's 1963 *The Birds*. Writer/director Wilson is savvy enough to fill his film with nods to that classic, most notably casting its star Rod Taylor in a substantial role; the trouble is, Wilson can't – even with whirling clouds of CGI ravens Hitch could only have dreamt of – summon any of the atmosphere of growing oppression and daylight dread that the Master achieved with far more limited means.

Anyone who dislikes *The Birds*'s resolute ambiguity and disquieting open-endedness, though, will be happy that *Kaw* at least provides an explanation for the avian aggression on display: the inveterate carrion-eaters have been pecking away at the carcasses of BSE-infected cattle on a Mennonite community farm; and these equally black-clad weirdoes have decided to hush the whole thing up, given that it's clearly a sign from God that they've been mixing with outsiders too much. I'm not sure what sort of message this sends out about Mennonites, but on the whole *Kaw* is at least a well-made effort, with effective cinematography and good performances (not least from some of the birds), but once again shows that Wilson (whose *Shallow Ground* was full of initial promise) can't sustain a film for its entire length without resorting to tired clichés and suspense-by-numbers.

And what's it all about? There

are undoubtedly some metaphors lurking beneath the surface here, but without the rich architecture of psycho-sexual meaning that bubbles through Hitchcock's far superior movie, you'd have to paraphrase Freud and say that, in movies like this, sometimes a bird is just a bird.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
NOT STRICTLY FOR THE BIRDS BUT
THIS NEVER REALLY TAKES FLIGHT

Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea

Dir Chris Metzler & Jeff Springer, US 2006
www.saltonseadoc.com £12.99

It's exactly 100 years since an engineering error led to the creation of a vast, yet now largely forgotten, lake in southeast California known as the Salton Sea. The result of a poorly thought-out irrigation plan, the lake was reinvented in the 1950s as a plush vacation resort, but a series of hurricanes, floods and fish die-offs left it virtually abandoned by the cocktails-and-waterskiing set.

This charming documentary celebrates the hardy eccentrics who stayed on. Accompanied by an apt voiceover from John Waters, the film roams around the communities that cling on to the lakeshores amid derelict cafés and piles of fish skeletons. On the way, we meet a bug-eyed exile from the Hungarian revolution called Hunky Daddy, an outsider artist building a multicoloured holy mountain out of mud and paint, and a roadside Christian nudist smiling beatifically at passing cars. All seem enriched by the fact that the American Dream is no longer in their sights, leaving them to enjoy the life they've been left with.

The Salton Sea is still facing environmental crisis today, as the nearby megalopolises of LA and San Diego threaten to drink up the agricultural run-off waters that barely sustain the lake. *Plagues and Pleasures* reveals what a sad loss it would be if this inspiring wreck of a place was turned to dust forever.

Alistair Strachan

Fortean Times Verdict
CHARMING PORTRAIT OF ONE OF
AMERICA'S STRANGEST PLACES

Tokyo Decadence

Dir Ryu Murakami, Japan 1992
Arrow Films £15.99

Director Ryu Murakami is a Japanese novelist who has been heaped with critical acclaim for his tales of decadent, disaffected youth. He wrote the book on which

Audition is based, and there are strong similarities between Miike's film and *Tokyo Decadence*, from a needle fixation to structural peculiarities and worldview.

Ai – a quiet, disturbed young girl, like *Audition*'s Asami – is a prostitute specialising in submission. As she trawls her bulging red bag of kit round an assortment of often drugged up-clients – a tycoon with a penthouse, a crackhead with a strangulation fetish, a necrophiliac, a fawning businessman called Turtlehead – she is variously humiliated, turned on, confused and freaked out. But her love for her ex endures.

And that, essentially, is it, story-wise. The film's progress is tied to Ai's psychological collapse but, again as in *Audition*, Murakami seems fascinated with the craziness but uninterested in its causes or plausibility. In another similarity, the two films both derive much of their power from unusual pacing, *Audition* calm and restrained throughout but then exploding into violence at the end, *Tokyo Decadence* a frantic pursuit of kicks which empties out, ultimately, as Ai unravels.

Whether or not you believe in Ai's motivation will largely determine whether you see the film as psychological drama conveyed through sex, or great-looking, imaginative porn with wit, intelligence and a quality score. Yet this distinction is, essentially, irrelevant; more importantly, *Tokyo Decadence* is an utterly compulsive expression of obsession and madness.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
THE SADISTS, MASOCHISTS AND
JUST PLAIN CRAZY FOLK OF TOKYO

House of Rock

Dir Stuart Evans, GB 2000
Fabulous Films £15.99

A firm favourite of the post-pub and doner kebab crew and, inexplicably, critics ("Britain's answer to *South Park*": *The Guardian*), *House of Rock* hypothesises how a bunch of dead rock stars (Lennon, Bolan and so on) would cohabit; which for the record is a bit like *The Young Ones* without any laughs. What the newly resurrected Noel Edmunds would call 'a one box game', it's desperately unfunny, sharing *South Park*'s cut 'n' paste, 2D approach to animation but none of its jaw-dropping offensiveness and insensitivity. Like the aforementioned Turkish delicacy, it probably should be enjoyed infrequently and in small portions.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
A DESPERATELY UNFUNNY TAKE ON
THE LIVES OF DEAD ROCK STARS

COLLECTIONS

CARY GRANT: THE MOVIE COLLECTION

(Universal, £149.99)



A whopping 21-disc set of the Bristol-boy-made-good's films, including some of his finest: *Bringing Up Baby* remains the best ever comedy about an out-of-place big cat, with Grant and Katherine Hep-

burn striking sparks off each other; *Sylvia Scarlett* is a real oddity, with Grant as a conman and a cross-dressing Hepburn enjoying what might be the screen's first girl-girl kiss; Grant plays second fiddle to Dietrich in *Blonde Venus*, which boasts the classic gorilla suit striptease; and *Suspicion* marks the star's brilliant debut for Hitchcock. There's plenty more to enjoy, and Grant is always riveting, but the 50s and 60s choices here are throwaway stuff. **DS 7/10**

JAMES STEWART COLLECTION

(Universal, £9.99 each)



Hitchcock's other major leading man of the 1950s was the very different James Stewart (whose sparring with Grant in *The Philadelphia Story* – sadly not included here – remains a joy), the subject of 13 new DVD releases, including three of his fabulous Anthony Mann westerns and four

Hitchcock classics (*Rope*, *Rear Window*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Vertigo*) as well as his role as the vanishing bandleader in *The Glenn Miller Story* and his double act with a giant invisible rabbit in *Harvey*. **DS 7/10**

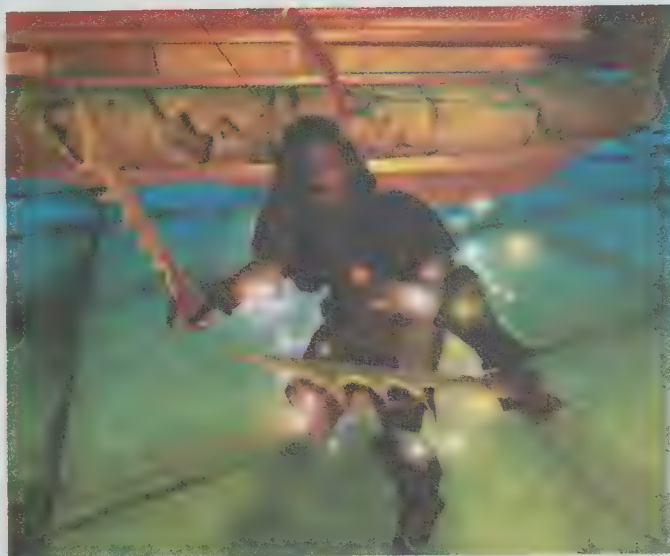
GEORGE FORMBY COLLECTION

(Optimum Classic, £39.99)



One of the first music hall stars to make a convincing transition to the screen, George Formby's persona of a gormless but good-hearted Lancashire lad saw him through 21 movies and made him, for a while, Britain's most popular male star (bizarrely, his proletarian antics also led

to a huge following in the wartime USSR and reputedly earned him the Order of Lenin – though doubt has recently been thrown on this well-known story; one for Mythconceptions?). Critics and sophisticates might have looked down their noses at his films, but Formby was a crucial figure in British screen comedy. That figure has stood the test of time, as these seven films, with their simple yet multifarious pleasures, demonstrate: knockabout stunts, flights of surreal, propagandistic fancy (George falling from the sky into a Nuremberg rally and punching Hitler on the nose), and saucy, BBC-baiting songs (accompanied by his trademark syncopated banjolele playing) which reveal an obsession with phallic imagery unrivalled outside of Freud. In the words of 'My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock': "It gets a little sticky, but I never complain / It's nice to have a nibble at it now and again". **DS 9/10**



Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

PC £29.99 Sony Online Entertainment/Sigil Games

Vanguard is the first title released by Sigil Games, but years of experience underlie its development. Many of the team worked on Everquest, the first massively multiplayer game to bring online role-playing to the masses. Does this mean Vanguard is a masterpiece, destined to bring low the mighty World of Warcraft?

Well, no, not really. WoW has succeeded primarily because it's easy. Everquest-lite, it eschews the long arduous grind for, um, a quick and simple grind. Vanguard, however, makes no concessions. It's the Yorkie to Warcraft's Milky Way – big, dense and proud of it – and clearly intended for a very different, and quite likely, smaller, audience. This isn't to say that a newcomer to MMORPGs should be put off; the tutorials are easy to follow and explain the basics competently. To get the most from what is on offer, however, requires time – appropriately epic amounts of time, in fact.

Killing everything that moves is still the primary means of advancement, but crafting and diplomacy are two completely separate games, with their own distinct experiences, equipment

and levels. Both are at least as complex and deep as the combat, which is itself a step up from other games. It's completely possible, for instance, to reach level 50 in diplomacy without killing anything. Vanguard will be familiar to those who have played other games within the genre, but it does at least try to advance beyond what has gone before to provide a more engrossing experience.

Having said all that, it remains a slightly problematic recommendation, for one very important reason – it's not finished.

Yes, it's released, it's in the shops, and you can play it, but it is not finished. Sigil, unfortunately, ran out of capital, and were forced into releasing Vanguard quickly; as a result, there are still some features missing and enough bugs to feed an ogre. They're not game-breaking, but they can and do interfere.

Vanguard is definitely not one for those who want instant gratification. It will take time, both to explore all the possibilities and for the missing features to be added. If you have that time to give it, however, this is probably the best game of its kind available.

Ben Hawes

Fortean Times Verdict
UNFINISHED AND SLOW, BUT ULTIMATELY REWARDING **7**

Maelstrom

PC £29.99 Codemasters/KDV Games

Mankind has unleashed ecological destruction and eradicated a large proportion of Earth's population as a result. The Remnants are all that remains of the army, and are locked in full-scale war with mega-corporation The Ascension (think Microsoft with advanced robotic death machines) over the resources that remain. The premise is not exactly new for a Real Time Strategy game, so what makes *Maelstrom* worthwhile?

Well, Codemasters have excelled in creating three factions that are totally different but at the same time very well balanced; quite an achievement in an RTS and one that certainly makes it stand out against the other big release, *Supreme Commander*.

To begin with you play as the Remnants, before moving on to play the Ascension, experts in robotic manipulation with a fun array of machines, from small forward attack vehicles such as the Viper to the impressive looking Colossus. As you progress, you find pretty much every vehicle in the Ascension arsenal can transform into another vehicle to fulfil a different function.

Once you have completed The Ascension campaigns, you finally get the chance to play as the Hai-Genti, aliens visiting Earth in the hope of drowning its remaining inhabitants and colonising the planet. The Hai-Genti are masters of bio-engineering, using an impressive variety of species to attack their enemies, and quite unlike anything you're likely to have come across in a RTS before.

The destructible landscape that can be terraformed defensively and offensively by the two human factions and flooded by the aliens is incredibly well done, and some of the graphics for vehicle movements and battles are supremely entertaining. Unfortunately, there is a major downside to all this.

The developers seem to have forgotten some of the basics of RTS gameplay with *Maelstrom*: way-pointing is pretty appalling, often requiring you to micro-manage troop movement if you don't want units wandering

aimlessly around the battlefield; the named heroes for each faction are ineffective and underused; and the campaign mode is largely pointless and irritating, as well as containing some of the worst animated cut-scenes I've ever seen. I'd recommend only playing up to the first Hai-Genti mission before moving over to the skirmish or on-line play modes to get the most out of this game.

J P Coxon

Fortean Times Verdict
WONDERFULLY INNOVATIVE BUT FATALITY FLAWED RTS **6**

Tombraider: Anniversary

PC, PS2 £29.99, Eidos/Crystal Dynamics

Following on from last year's *Legend*, Eidos and Miss Croft return with *Anniversary*.

On the face of it, this seems nothing but an update of the original *Tomb Raider*, but is much more once you start playing. For a start, using the engine created by Crystal Dynamics for the previous outing gives the whole thing far greater depth. The levels are larger, the graphics, naturally given the decade of technological progress since the first game, are fantastic. Dark creepy tunnels open into huge vistas as the camera sweeps and the sparingly used score effectively ramps up the tension when required.

This time Lara is back to basics. No torches, light sticks or magic binoculars, just a trusty pair of guns and her wits. That a couple of new abilities: La Croft can now balance on top of a pole and wall run a-la Prince of Persia.

As usual there are complaints from some quarters that the game is too short, but I didn't find it so. It carries all the familiar trademarks of the *TR* series: repeatedly dying whilst attempting the same apparently simple jump and puzzles ranging from infuriatingly obscure to just plain infuriating – all of which is forgotten once the puzzle is finally solved.

Welcome back, Lara!
Richmond Clements

Fortean Times Verdict
SO MUCH FUN YOU DON'T EVEN FEEL GUILTY KILLING GORILLAS! **9**

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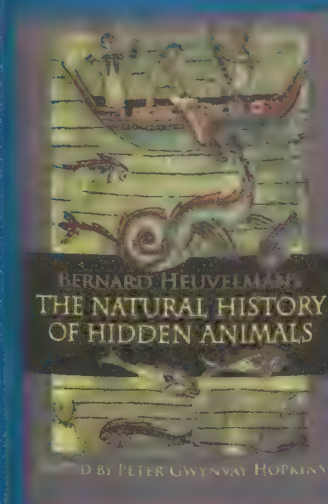
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Dear FT...

letters



Not a clue

I happened to be watching *The Weakest Link* on BBC2 this evening [28 May 2007] – Yes, there really wasn't anything else on – when Anne Robinson asked the question "The name of a journal founded in 1973 which relates to the paranormal is 'Fortean What?'" (You would need to get a transcript for the exact wording; however, she pronounced "fortean" in a rather strange way – but that's what you'd expect from someone from Crosby). The contestant didn't have a clue. However, I found the fact that *FT* has made it to such elevated heights very exciting.

Rob Gandy
By email

Fortean perks

I recently acquired a computer-based Scrabble game, which I have been playing with tonight [18 April]. I had the television on in the background, waiting for a programme to start. It was showing a documentary about Rosslyn Chapel and all that that entails (*Holy Blood and Holy Grail*, Christ's blood line, Knights Templar, *Da Vinci Code*, and so on). I began a new game and looked down at my computer screen. My first rack of letters were the following in this exact order: LORDJEW. I would imagine that the chances of a random selection of seven letters spelling anything coherent is fairly small; that it should be both coherent and related to an independent second source is surely beyond reasonable expectation.

What then can we deduce from this? Absolutely nothing of consequence that I can see. We can only marvel at the wonders of the Universe and ponder the interconnectedness of all things. With such small pleasures is the fortenean day filled to bursting point. Isn't life grand?

CP Dean
London

Simulacra Corner



Conrad Mackinnon noticed this tree in the woods beside the village of Balloch near Inverness.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the

editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll give you six months of *FTs* free for any we use.

ME & MS

I found the letter from myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) sufferer Rebecca Maull [FT224:74] responding to my Forum article [FT222:55] rather disturbing. It is simply not correct that "not so long ago" multiple sclerosis (MS) "was similarly regarded as a mental illness". Why would it be, when it is named after its organic pathological lesion in the central nervous system? The lesion was discovered by the great French neurologist Charcot in 1865, three years before he described the

clinical disease. It is clear that the "medical community" always recognised MS as an organic disease, and never characterised its sufferers as "hysterics... told to get out of their wheelchairs".

In sharp contrast, the ostensible pathology underlying ME, a global inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, simply doesn't exist. Also, it is unfair to imply that mental illness is somehow not "real". It is very real and much of it may have an organic basis, in terms of brain chemistry.

Nick Warren
Pinner, Middlesex

Parking place power

May I offer another contribution to your discussion of pixilation [FT219:72]? Firstly, whatever happened to the Gremlin plague of World War II? Anything that didn't work in the Air Force or its supporting services was their work, or so we were led to believe. When did they relegate the task to pixies?

Mr Zvi Ron brings to light a cosmic benefit [of returning misplaced articles] apparently available for the asking. Our family has its own, less impressive, version of something similar. If any member arrives in what is clearly a crowded parking lot, we simply call out loud: "George, please find me a parking spot." Lo, either someone pulls out or we discover a space in the midst of the multitude. Seldom does George fail. I can't say where this originated; I haven't met anyone else making the same request from whomsoever controls parking lots. I just hope George doesn't mind my mentioning the assistance he has provided over the years.

Graham Conway
Delta, British Columbia

From 8 June 1989 until 16 Jan 2002, I worked as a bagger and carryout boy at a large grocery supermarket in Ashland, Kentucky, quitting when I was over 82, and I told many customers how to get parking places. One young woman said, "I just say a prayer." A doctor's wife said that she told her daughter in California about the system, and the daughter reported that it worked out there also. I'd like to hear from forteneans who find that it works for them.

Fifteen minutes before reaching the parking place you want, you visualise that it is empty. As you get closer, you reinforce the visualisation three times. It will be empty when you get there. On 5 Jan 2007, the driver was pulling out from the place I wanted just as my wife pulled beside it.

Steve Ogden
By email

Stadt füßen



Three-legged

When I was a young boy, I saw the flag of the city of Jülich, which shows the three-legged version of the coat of arms (FT224:28). My stay was short and I was unable to find out anything about it. Could it have been an ancient Celtic symbol? In Dordrecht, Holland, Belgium.

Physical mediumship

Thank you for reviewing my book, *The Spirit of Dr Bindelof: The Enigma of Séance Phenomena* [FT222:63] and for the kind words written by Tom Ruffles. However, in justice to my work, I must reply to some of his comments. He feels that I am unkind to Richard Hodgson and that I fail to mention Mrs Piper. I didn't mention Piper because she was a mental medium and this book deals with physical mediumship. I think the majority of historians would consider me fair in my evaluation of Hodgson's record with physical mediums. As for Mr Ruffles's opinion that I could have subjected the Bindelof group's phenomena to closer scrutiny, I might point out that I knew Gil Roller for more than 30 years, and in that time met and interviewed anyone still alive who participated in those sittings. The impeccable records and materials kept by the members and preserved by Dr Montague Ullman, who became a parapsychologist because of his

experiences in the group, make it one of the best-documented cases in the literature.

The first part of the book is a long overdue account, in a very palatable way, of Gil Roller's and the Bindelof group's extraordinary experiences. The rest of it is there to inform those not acquainted with this rare type of mediumship of its long history and documentation, to show that there was a precedent for what these teenagers accomplished and to demonstrate that 'spirits' are not necessary for the elicitation of these powers. I gave enough references for those who are interested in learning more to get started easily. I am pleased to say that the book has been praised both by neophytes and by the cognoscenti of the field.

One of my purposes is to encourage scientists to look into why these unusually gifted people seem to be able to alter gravitational fields, affect film, or transform the matter of their bodies into thought forms or "phantoms" that mimic living persons but can dissolve before investigators' eyes. I wish that Mr Ruffles had spent less time in

commenting on trivial matters, (for example on an adjective I used to describe my ex-husband) and concentrated on the more important aspects of the book, such as the implications of these phenomena for understanding the human organism. **Rosemarie Pilkington**
Staten Island, New York

The streets of Kendal

My wife and I recently visited her parents in Kendal, Cumberland, where I was surprised at some of the street names. Just off the high street, there are streets known as Beast Banks, Sepulchre Lane, All Hallows Lane and Serpentine Road. I mentioned this seemingly occult-influenced nomenclature to the in-laws, but they were unable to explain it – can anyone shed any light?

Andy Cassidy
By email

Pink Pussy

I think I can give an explanation for the pink pussy [FT222:6]. Many years ago, I had a new white kitten and I couldn't bear to leave him home on his first day, so I took him to work with me where there was a polished red floor that had red floor polish regularly applied to it. The kitten rolled around on his back on a warm sunny patch, and came home with pink markings on him similar to the cat in your photograph. I still have the scratch marks to show for my efforts at washing him.

Anita Youke
Aylesbury

Rat migration

With reference to the "march of rats" [FT222:73]: in the late 1960s, I lived in a small village about six miles from Diss in Norfolk. As I was coming home one evening from work, my headlights picked out a moving object in the twilight. I slowed down and then stopped, thinking it was maybe a cat or hedgehog. I then saw it was a huge rat, which crossed the road into a field. Just as I was about to start the

engine, more rats appeared, two or three abreast, and they kept coming and coming. I don't know how long I watched them. They took no notice of the car, looking neither to the left nor right; their main object seemed to be to follow their leader. At last, the column came to an end and they disappeared into the darkness.

A few days later, I told my story to an old farm labourer who lived in the village. "Lucky you, seeing a rat migration," he said. "Not many people have. They do this when all the food in the vicinity is finished." A few weeks later, I read a magazine article by a man who lived in the Fens in Cambridgeshire. One evening, cycling home from work, he had ridden into a column of rats, causing him to crash and land among them. He managed to get to his feet, but not before he had been badly bitten. He said it had been a terrifying experience.

Miss Nanette Reynolds
Banstead, Surrey

My grandfather used to tell a tale of how he and his father were walking along the Tees banks somewhere around the Grange-town area, probably before 1920, when his father suddenly said "Stand still!" and he saw a large swarm of rats running towards them. The rats poured all around them and even over their shoes, but didn't touch them otherwise. A colleague at work some 15 years ago told me something similar had happened to his father (and an uncle, if I recall). They were sitting on a farm gate when a swarm of rats poured along the lane and under the gate, otherwise ignoring them.

It wouldn't be wise to assume rats will always ignore you: a communist who fought with the International Brigades in Spain, whose name I've forgotten, relates that he worked in the old Boulby ironstone mine to the north of Staithes. On one occasion he was trapped by a swarm of rats, but was able to get out of their reach by climbing into some sort of bucket affair (hanging in a shaft or something), where he was trapped for a while.

George R Featherston
Redcar, Cleveland

Toads in the hole

Further to Jan Bondeson's feature on entombed toads [FT221:38-42], here are two examples of the phenomenon from the *Illustrated London News* in the 1840s:

"An Antediluvian Toad. While some workmen were employed, last week, at their avocations in Boag Quarry, near Stevenson, Ayrshire, they, on breaking up a piece of rock, found a toad 'imbedded in the mass'. On being released from its prison-house it lay motionless for several minutes, but eventually became animated, and at present is quite lively. It is very large, and somewhat different in appearance from the common toad. In fact, it seems to have been a 'sleeping Beauty' for 'untold ages.'" [20 May 1843.]

"EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY – In the excavations for the improvement of the Caledonian Canal, a curious circumstance was observed at Bona. In removing some of the ruins a number of human bones, the teeth being remarkably fresh and entire, and one complete skeleton, were found. Some coins of the reign of Elizabeth were dug up; but what occasioned most surprise was the discovery of a nest of toads, completely encased in the solid wall, with apparently not the slightest opening by which ingress could be obtained. In a small cavity, about three inches in diameter, were found six toads and a lizard. On their first admission to the light of day, the toads appeared insensible, but on being touched by the men they speedily revived." [19 October 1844.]

Valerie Karatzas
Ashley Down, Bristol

Space Cousins

I recently thought of a new term to introduce into the ufological literature. We all know that there are two kinds of ETs, both in the reports and in the movies. There's the reptilian, insectoid, grotesque-intruder types from Zeti Reticuli (you know, the ones that have a deal worked out with the government to turn Earth into a gigantic Lovecraftian mat-

ernity ward, the ones who call all the shots on natural disasters, abductions – and of course the media, the Freemasons, and the Royal Family). Then there's the gentle, enlightened, light-skinned forms, who make crop circles and try to warn us about our imminent destruction: the Space Brothers (and Sisters of course).

The thing is, there has got to be at least one more category. You know what kind I mean, too, I bet. The kind that don't exactly make you go for your gun, but that you're not exactly thrilled to see, either. The Space Cousins. The ones who aren't particularly hostile or traumatising – just offensive or irritating. The ones that manifest in your bedroom in the middle of the night, ask you for a glass of water, and then when you go get it and come back they're gone; the ones that use their electromagnetic beams to stop your car engine on some deserted back road just so they can moon you. The ones that, let's face it, sometimes go a little overboard with their laser-pointer cow-tipping (and don't clean up the mess, either!).

The 1961 "Simonton Pancakes" incident is a textbook example of this Space Cousin phenomenon. The accounts of this event describe a rural Wisconsin man, Joe Simonton, going out of his house around 11am after hearing a loud noise; whereupon he saw three humanoid get out of a silver craft. They were "Italian-looking" and "spoke no English" according to Simonton. They presented him with four pancakes hot off the stove inside the saucer, where a man appeared to be cooking them. Simonton ate one of them. "It tasted like cardboard," he later told reporters. J Allen Hynek had the remaining three pancakes analysed; they were made of normal ingredients, but maybe a little heavy on the wheat germ. Who needs that shit at 11am in the morning! I mean, how about some bacon? Doesn't this sound way too much like your proverbial aunt showing up with a freshly baked fruitcake?

These kinds of encounters

are what I call Close Encounters of the Third & 1/3 Kind. The third kind is of course when you "see" or "meet" a UFO occupant. The fourth kind is when you have a meaningfully resonant, transformative, or traumatic experience; and I suppose by this reasoning the fifth kind would be continuing, recurrent contact, including things like serial abductions or prophetic messages. But the *Third* and a *Third* Kind, now, this is a different leg of the phenomenon entirely. This is when you meet UFO occupants, and they just irritate or annoy you.

One possibility that has not been addressed is that the Simon-ton Pancake ufonauts may have been early representatives from that fanatical vegetarian doctors group, the ones Dr Atkins's widow referred to in *Time* magazine as "the vegetarian Taliban", just out pushing their sinister nutritional agendas. It's worse than you thought, sister: the Taliban don't have flying saucers... or portable stoves, for that matter. Maybe the real menace is here at home.

Arthur Taris Haman
By email

Rovers' leap

I missed the original article about the dogs jumping off Over-toun Bridge [FT196:4], but I read the follow-up [FT218:10] with interest as my parents' dog Bruno made this leap several years ago.

Your article claims that only one dog has survived the fall – but Bruno survived. I assume the information about the survival rate came from the Channel 5 programme; my sister was actually shown on the programme, although only briefly, so the makers must have been aware of Bruno's survival.

My sister was walking him on the estate and as they approached the bridge he dashed over to one of the parapets and leapt over. My sister looked over the edge and saw Bruno lying motionless. She thought he was dead but by the

time she'd run to the house and got a builder from there to go down (she didn't want to retrieve his dead body herself) he'd woken up and was howling. His only injury was a slight cut on his knee that required stitches and an apparent loss of memory: he shows no fear or dislike of the bridge. My family doesn't let him off the lead near it anymore.

When I was at the bridge, my sister pointed out the spot where he jumped over and I had a look. There was a tree quite near, so I concluded that the branches had slowed his fall enough to prevent him breaking any bones.

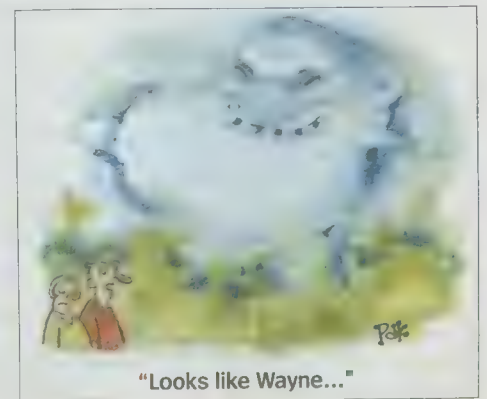
I'd also like to point out that the phrase "right-hand side" of the bridge has no meaning without qualifying it with the direction of travel (to or from Over-toun house is how I would think of it) and I don't see how the dogs can have jumped from between the "final two parapets" on either side as there are only two parapets on each side. For the record, Bruno jumped over at the first parapet on the right-hand side as you approach the house.

Alan Third
By email

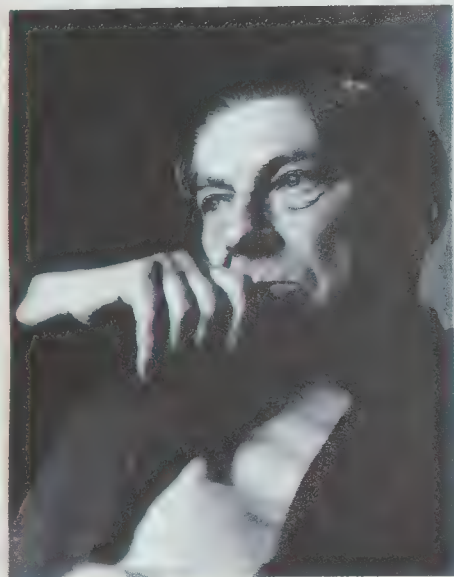
Not literal

In "Fish Skin" [FT223:14], it says: "ichthyosis (literally 'fish skin')"; but that word actually breaks down as ichthy(s) (fish) plus -osis (an abstracting suffix, rather like the Latin '-ity'). There's not actually a word for 'skin' here, except insofar as in English "ichthyosis" refers to a skin condition rather than to some other disease calling fish to mind.

Daniel Kian Mc Kiernan
By email



"Looks like Wayne..."



PSI research

I was one of those interviewed for the Robert Morris Chair in Parapsychology at the University of Edinburgh, and so I read with interest Guy Lyon Playfair's description of the four candidates: "Three high-profile sceptics and a little-known sociologist" [FT224:58-59]. As I'm not a high-profile sceptic, I assume that I'm the little-known sociologist to whom he refers – and I wish to object! I don't take issue with the 'little-known' claim, as that's a fair call; but I am concerned with what his account of the appointment process implies: that it was bad enough that Edinburgh saw fit to interview sceptics, but (splutter! cough!) a sociologist?

But why not a sociologist? Spontaneous anomalous experiences occur to people enmeshed in a range of cultural, social and interpersonal contexts; they come to light for scientific investigation because people speak and write of them, using socially organised discursive and communicative skills; and their ramifications are seen in changes in social identity, values and belief systems. Anomalous experiences, whatever their nature, are inextricably implicated in precisely the social processes sociologists study.

Here in the Department of Sociology at the University of York we have established the Anomalous Experiences Research Unit (more information about

AERU can be found at www.york.ac.uk/depts/soci/aeru.htm). We are exploring how social science methods and perspectives can be developed to further our understanding of, amongst other things, the causes, characteristics and consequences of experiences that suggest exceptional forms of communication (such as psi) or anomalous agencies (such as spirits). Our research acknowledges the wider social dimensions of paranormal experiences that are often overlooked in laboratory-based experimental parapsychology. We hope our research will therefore complement the work of colleagues in parapsychology research centres.

We are an interdisciplinary bunch: members of the Unit have backgrounds in studies of science, language and communication, anthropology, psychology, social psychology and experimental parapsychology. What we have in common, though, is an interest in exploring and developing new methodological techniques and approaches to the analysis of exceptional experiences and anomalous phenomena in their wider social contexts. As such, we hope to contribute to debates about the kind of discipline parapsychology can be.

Dr Robin Woolfitt
Anomalous Experiences Research Unit, Department of Sociology, University of York

Guy Lyon Playfair discusses how funds that had been originally allocated for research on parapsychology were instead diverted into "conventional psychology". While this has been too often the case, he makes very serious errors of omission and commission. With regard to the former, he describes the Thorsen chair at Lund, which I now hold, as "a chair of psychology" (italics in the original), but he fails to mention that it is a chair of psychology

including parapsychology and hypnology, as has been advertised and repeated by the university countless times. During the 20 or so months I have held this chair, I have lectured repeatedly on parapsychology, have presented and am scheduled to present various papers at the Parapsychological Association's (PA) Annual Conventions, am on the Board of Directors of the PA, and will teach a regular university course on altered states of consciousness and parapsychology in the Fall 2007 term. I am also supervising a doctoral student who has previous publications in parapsychology journals. He and I obtained two different grants to conduct experimental research on parapsychology and are now working on those projects. And yet for Playfair this doesn't seem to qualify as parapsychology-related activity.

He tendentiously describes "anomalous psychology" [as] the study of why people are crazy enough to believe in psi in the first place. Nothing could be further from the truth! In the first book published by a major mainstream psychological press in this area (*Varieties of Anomalous Experience* by Cardeña, Lynn & Krippner, American Psychological Association, 2000), we specifically differentiated 'anomalous' experiences from abnormal or pathological symptoms (p4), and included a chapter on "psi-related experiences" (Targ, Schlitz, & Irwin, 2000), with a very sympathetic discussion of the evidence for these phenomena. Various psi research centres in Europe use the "anomalous" designation (Lund University, The University of Northampton, and The University of York, among others). Although the problem about the academic bias against parapsychology is very serious, the field is not helped by articles that groundlessly attack some of the few centres and individuals actually engaged in research on psi and germane phenomena.

Dr Etzel Cardeña
Thorsen Professor, Department of Psychology, Centre for Research on Consciousness and Anomalous Psychology (CERCAP), University of Lund, Sweden

Playfair mentions "Freiburg (the Astrid Holler fund)" as a lamentable example for "funds specifically intended for psi research" which were "diverted into conventional psychology". Leaving aside the fact that there exists no "Astrid", but only an "Asta Holler fund", his statement is grossly misleading. When the Freiburg 'Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene' (IGPP) [Institute for Border Areas of Psychology and Mental Hygiene] became funded by the Holler Foundation in the early 1990s, research grants equivalent to several million euros were given to major research institutes and laboratories in the field of parapsychology, especially the Koestler Chair (Edinburgh), PEAR (Princeton), RRC (Durham), Division of Personality Studies (Charlottesville), PF (New York), IMI (Paris) etc., not to mention the funding of PhD dissertations, conferences or publications dealing with parapsychological topics. This fact is well known in the international parapsychological community, but apparently not to Playfair.

Furthermore, the research agenda of the IGPP according to the legacy of its founder Professor Hans Bender (1907-1991), my former academic teacher, who finally succeeded in convincing Mrs Asta Holler to fund his Institute, was never formally restricted to 'psi research' *per se*. "Border Areas of Psychology" implies not only the investigation of paranormal phenomena in the 'classical' sense (ESP & PK), but also a broad spectrum of "insufficiently understood phenomena and anomalies at the frontiers of current scientific knowledge". To give a recent example: Treating psi phenomena as "entanglement correlations in a generalised quantum theory" is, so to speak, a "spin off" product of this interdisciplinary IGPP approach.

I'm glad to see that well-informed science writers like Damien Broderick in his latest book *Outside the Gates of Science* (New York, 2007) appreciate this fact.

Eberhard Bauer
Council Member, IGPP Freiburg, Germany.

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from FT readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Fleeing the Wendigo

I was living in central Canada in 2000 and was off work for about two months due to a sports injury. During my rehabilitation, I did a lot of hiking and small game hunting on the outskirts of the city. One afternoon, I found myself a little deeper into the forest than I intended, and decided to head back – my leg had not fully healed, and I became aware of how lonely it was out there. As I walked, the sun seemed to go down quicker than I had expected. The calibre of my rifle was only capable of killing small game, and there were native stories in the area concerning a spirit or creature called the Wendigo. I was fighting off mild panic when I heard a sound that I have never heard before or since, and it turned my blood cold. It sounded like a human growling, but with echoes of children growling or screaming in unison. The visual image I got in my head was of an attack of huge flies or piranhas or something. The sound emanated from the top of a forested hill off to my right, about 75ft (23m) away. I couldn't have been more scared if someone had a gun to my head.

I made it back to my truck about five minutes later, jumped into the cab and put my head down on the steering wheel as I exhaled deeply. Safety. I waited there for maybe a minute before I put the key in the ignition. At the same time, some dirt or sand was thrown at the side window, and something smashed into the back of the truck hard enough to knock the tools around in the back. Needless to say, I didn't stick around to shake its hand. Although I have no trouble going into dense forest in daylight, I still have bad dreams and slight anxiety I attribute to this incident.

L.U.
By email

Sea dream

In 1995, I was a deckhand in the motor-yacht industry in southern France. I was due to marry my fiancée and that July I had undertaken a three-week trip that would help to pay for our wedding. On the second



I couldn't have been more scared if someone had a gun to my head

night at sea, our motor-yacht hit a violent storm in the Gulf de Lion. As an inexperienced seaman, I quickly discovered that I suffered from seasickness, which contributed to my falling violently on the aft deck. I bruised some ribs in the process and the captain quickly saw I was in no fit state to stay on deck. I was promptly sent to my cabin to rest, during which time I managed to catch about half an hour's sleep.

During my difficult slumber, I dreamt that I was in mortal danger and that I needed to see my fiancée. I vividly remember standing at the foot of our bed back home, watching over her as she slept. My dream was suddenly interrupted by the crashing of seawater penetrating the air duct above my head. I think this is why I was able to recall this dream with such clarity. It was so real that the next day I recorded the time and date in my travel diary. The rest of the trip was very successful and I quickly explained my odd experience as a reaction to my first ever storm at sea.

Once reunited with my fiancée,

almost immediately and without any prompting, she told me how on the second night I was away, she had been awakened by the silhouette of a man standing at the foot of her bed. She was terrified until she recognised the outline as my own. She thought the trip had been cancelled and that I had come home early, only to see the silhouette vanish! By checking my diary I was able to confirm the date and time of the event. It is for this reason that Adrian Boyle's comments in 'Objective Testing' [FT213:74] are so valid. It is by recording evidence and independent witnesses that events such as this stand the test of time and changing memories.

Eddie Grundy
Manchester

Brownies at work?

Last night [12 May 2007], I'd just finished reading Merrily Harpur's excellent book *Mystery Big Cats* and was trying to explain to my partner Chris the book's main hypothesis, that ABCs are examples of what Ms Harpur's brother Patrick has defined as daimons. As Chris is not a long-time student of forteana, and I can chunter for England after a couple of beers, this meant that I set off on a long ramble about how there appear to be fashions in phenomena – so for example, earlier cultures had fairies while we have aliens, both with similar attributes, but in different drag. I went on to say that some

versions of daimons appear to have died out, pointing out that no one encounters Brownies in their role of household helpers any more. Then, thinking about one of the Brownies' roles and recalling various letters in "It Happened To Me", I said something about the exception being the Thing That Brings Back Lost Stuff.

Meanwhile, Chris had tuned me out a bit (I was going on!) and started picking around on the floor behind a mirror resting up on the wall near which she was sitting. Picking up something, she said "Ha – there are Brownies!" and showed me a pin which had come out of the front door when she moved in some three months before, and had been missing since. I didn't believe that she had really just found it, and wasn't just teasing me, but she is adamant that she found it at just that moment.

Now, I realise that, as reappearing objects go, this is quite tame, as there hadn't been a big search for the pin (we knew it had come out when the door was taken off to get a piano moved in, but the door worked without it, and there were other jobs to do), and it could quite easily have been behind the mirror since it came out of the door. However, the fact that the finding coincided with the 'invoking', as it were, of the Finder Helper was remarkable.

The wider context of the event should also be noted, in that the previous night we had argued about ghosts, with me denying they were anything to do with post-mortem survival, and Chris taking the opposite view. Thus, to her, the finding of the pin represented some proof of the objective reality of entities external to the percipient.

It's also worth mentioning that, after this happened, I said that we should really leave something for the Brownie, and Chris went to the kitchen and got a pot of honey, which she laid on the skirting boxing by the front door (as in many Northern homes, the front door is rarely used). What she was not aware of was that, in Ms Harpur's book, there's a quotation about honeycomb as one of the appropriate gifts for Brownies, and that these gifts should be left in a quiet corner of the house.

Today, some of the honey has gone. I suspect nocturnal household bugs, but who knows?

Jake Kirkwood
Leeds

reader info

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how to submit

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Please send all submissions to David Sutton, Editor, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD, UK or email david_sutton@dennis.co.uk. As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate. A contributors' guide is available. For the latest version of this please contact us on one of the numbers on the editorial page or consult our website at www.forteanimes.com.

Letters

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP, UK or email sieveling@forteanimes.com. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

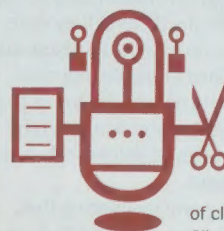
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Send to: Reviews Editor, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD, UK. Send DVDs and games to the Editor, as above.

Caveat

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. FT can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

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Regular clippers have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals,

local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 7 August 2007. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities - such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediaeval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX



TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND FORTEAN TIMES FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM FT'S PAST.

AUGUST 1977

Very early on the 9th, PC David Swift's patrol took him past playing fields on Stonebridge Avenue, East Hull, where he spotted a strange bank of fog. Fearing it might be smoke, he set out across the fields to investigate. As he neared, he could make out three figures who seemed to be dancing, each with an arm raised as though around an invisible maypole. Gradually, he could make out some details. The male seemed to be wearing a sleeveless jerkin and tight-fitting leggings, and two females wore bonnets, shawls and white dresses. Thinking they were late revellers, he approached them when, suddenly, they vanished. Disconcerted, he ran back to his car and drove around until he felt calm enough to report it to his sergeant. An odd little local news story, but one we delight in because it conforms to several classic fairylore motifs, including strange dancers in a fairy ring who fade when approached. If PC Swift had stepped among them, would he too have vanished, we wonder, his far-away calls for help heard on that spot every anniversary thereafter? FT23:7

Beginning in the previous month (July), the state of Illinois was experiencing a flap of Big Bird sightings. The most mem-

"AN OVERGROWN VULTURE" ATTEMPTED TO FLY OFF WITH A 10-YEAR-OLD BOY

orable took place at Lawndale, on 25 July, when a bird that looked like "an overgrown vulture" attempted to fly off with 10-year-old Marlon Lowe. The screaming, struggling (65lb/29kg) boy was actually carried nearly 30 yards before he was dropped. FT24:12f

AUGUST 1987

Here's a *Mythconception* that I don't think Mat Coward has tackled yet. It concerns the well-worn American tradition that Manhattan Island was originally sold to the Dutch colonists for \$24 worth of beads. This month, US archaeologist Peter Francis – a director of the Bead Research Center at Lake Placid – announced that the story is a fabrication. After years of research into the life of Dutchman Peter Minuit, said to have been given the 22,000 acres (8,900ha) of prime real estate for the box of beads, Francis declares the tale to have been invented by Martha Lamb in her 1877 book *History of the City of New York*. FT50:12

Rosalinda de Hernandez was in a state of shock when doctors in Honduras told her the bad news about her husband Gustavo. They had been married for nine years, so perhaps that is understandable. It was not so much that he had been killed in a barfight by a

woman, but rather that he *was* a woman... and six months' pregnant. FT50:27

AUGUST 1997

On the last day of July, the Tokyo district of Yokosuka was blacked out. It took nearly an hour for engineers from the Tokyo Electric Company to find the cause: a 20in (50cm) long electric eel. Its charred corpse was found draped across a 6,000-volt power line. A bird was presumed to have dropped it. A few days later came a report from Nykobing, on Denmark's Western Falster Island, where a German visitor enjoying a cup of coffee in the open air was hit by a falling eel. Stunned, all he could mutter was that it was "big and slimy". As Harry Hill might ask, what are the chances of that happening, eh? FT104:7

At a meeting of the national Geographic Society in Washington DC, geologists David Roberts and Lee Berger of the University of Witwaterstrand announced the discovery of a set of three unique fossilised footprints. They were uncovered on the shore of the ancient Langebaan Lagoon, 60 miles (96km) north of Cape Town. Up to then, the oldest preserved footprints were in Kenya (1.5 million years old) and Tanzania (3.6 million years old), both of them made by pre-*sapiens* hominids. The new find appeared to have been produced by a small, anatomically modern, human female about 117,000 years ago.

Commenting on the photo we printed of a man's foot alongside the tracks for comparison, Neanderthal apologist Stan Gooch wrote to us pointing out the man's short big toe, apparently a characteristic of Neanderthal feet. "How is it that experts who can see an entire catalogue of wonders in an extremely fuzzy footprint cannot see an almost perfect Neanderthal foot on a living human being?" he asked. FT104:17

COMING NEXT MONTH

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Alien mind control and murder

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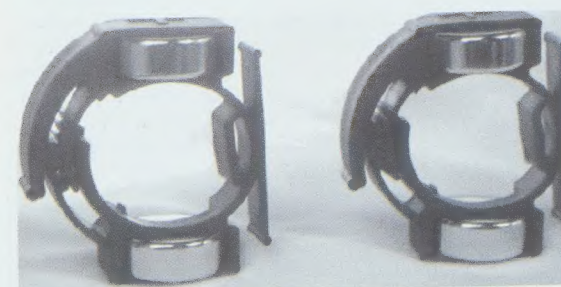
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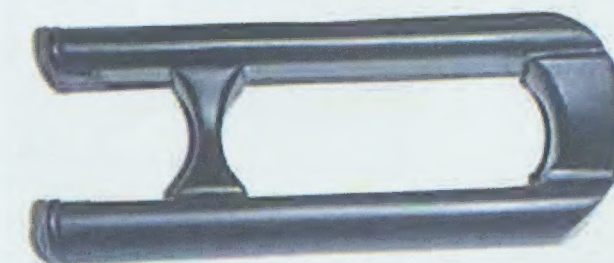
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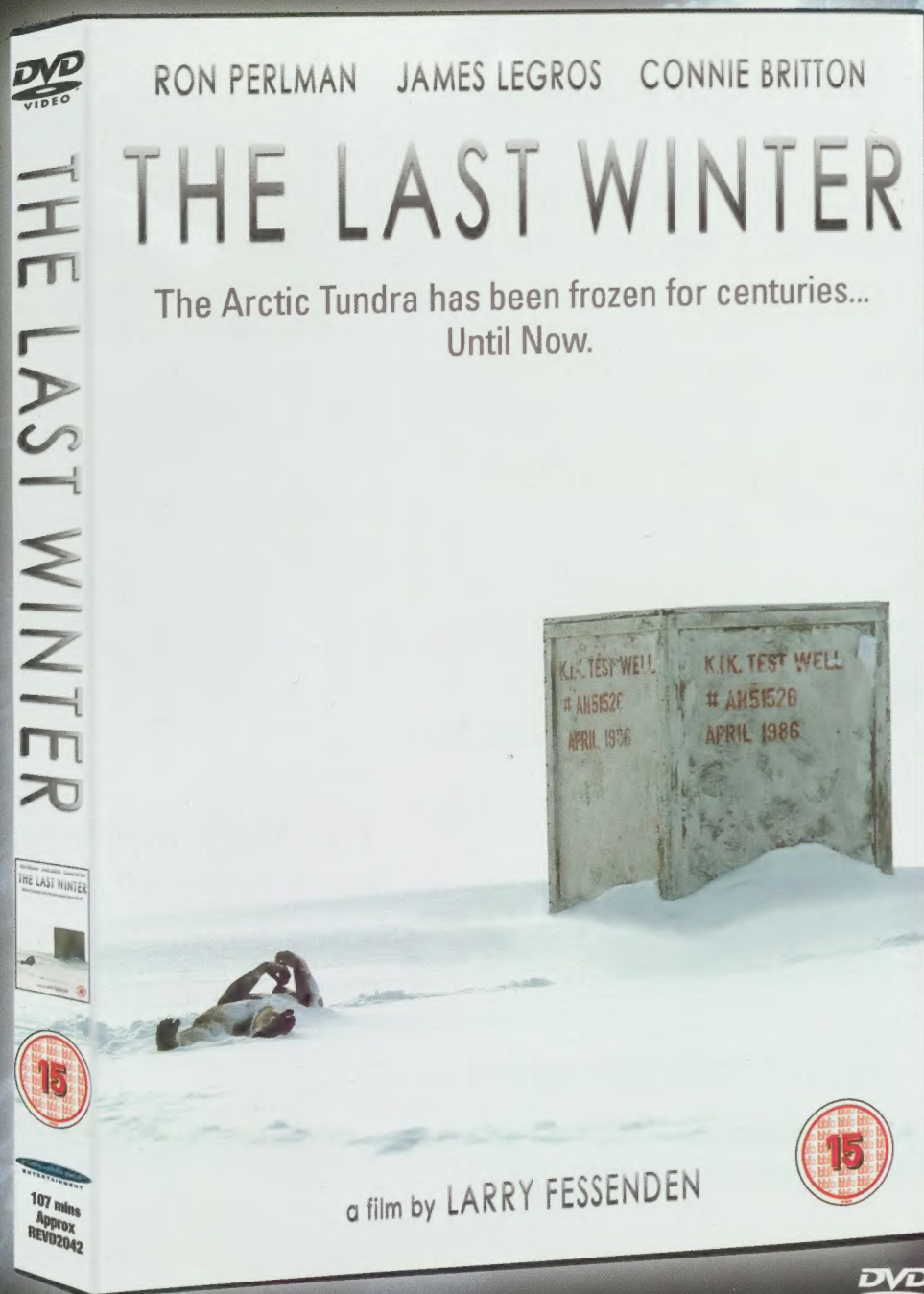
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